Our Common Heritage

A collection of six essays about the social history of Chiltern commons
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The Chilterns Conservation Board is grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their financial support from 2011 to 2015 which made the Chilterns Commons Project possible. We are also grateful to the project’s 18 other financial partners, including the Chiltern Society.

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Our Common Heritage

The Chilterns were first named and recognised as a distinctive region by the Anglo Saxons in the 7th century and we can trace the history of the commons back to the establishment of the early parishes and the colonisation of the Chiltern woods and wastes during this period. The distinctive character of the Chilterns is founded on its geology and relief as the chalk scarp rises proud of the clay vale and dips gently south-eastwards. It is a deeply dissected landscape of narrow valleys and steep hills with heavy, acidic, stony clay soils on the top. The majority of commons and heaths are on the least fertile soils, at the top of the scarp and on the hilltops, or at the base of the dip slope.

The Chilterns Conservation Board’s Commons Project included the whole of the Natural Area of the Chilterns, as designated by Natural England, which includes around 200 registered commons. Its success in involving local people and raising public awareness has been paramount in understanding the unique natural and cultural heritage of this precious legacy. With a united approach that encompasses many surviving commons and with partnerships that involve volunteers working on those that need improvement, the project has helped to ensure that sustainable management will secure their future. Open space with access to everyone has always been a part of the Chilterns’ history. Although the way that commons have been used has chopped and changed (quite literally), the motivation to embrace the outdoors is as strong today as it has ever been.

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The six essays in this publication reflect the diversity of uses that commons provided in a region that was both a major route to the capital and a hotbed of nonconformity and dissent. They reflect the everyday difficulties of living in a place where the water supply away from the spring-line was insufficient and farming was hard work on soils that were either heavy and stony, or thin and poor. The undulating relief and steep slopes meant travel was challenging. For some, the commons and heaths provided rough grazing and fuel and for others they were ‘a safety valve where those without a land holding could find a perch and scrape a livelihood’ (Hepple and Doggett, The Chilterns). Community rights were deeply embedded in the early medieval social system, but common rights did not mean a free-for-all. The rights were regulated and restricted by tradition, charter, and social position. Many of the largest wooded regions were wood-pasture commons that attempted to combine multiple uses. Commons on the plateau saw industries like brick making and pottery kilns located, as at Nettlebed. As the dedicated research in these papers shows, their legacies survive in the archives and on the ground.

In the opening essay, Enclosures in Watlington: the full circle, Laura Mason draws together a history of Chiltern commons as she investigates the gradual disappearance of the local commons with successive enclosures to their modern recreational use. The impact this had on impoverished parishioners from medieval times to the Victorian era is often best observed in records of their misdemeanours and the harsh punishments they received.

In Dissension to Domesticity Andrew Murie’s thorough research provides an unbroken timeline of the history of dissent and religious nonconformity in the Chilterns, starting in the 14th century. It leaves us in no doubt that the Chilterns have had a reputation for dissent from authority and orthodoxy, beginning with the Lollards, and it is not always a happy tale. He maps the nonconformist survival through its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and beautifully illustrates the legacy of little chapels that remain as testament to Wesleyan, Methodist, Baptist and other nonconformist communities.
Phillip Clapham’s *Meat to Market: droving through the Chilterns* is a well-constructed detective story pulling out clues from all manner of sources to work out where drovers moved their livestock through the Chilterns from as far away as Wales and Scotland. Most of the routes were never formally recorded, but vast numbers of sheep and cattle must have passed through the region, especially to the London markets. It is suggested that drovers often avoided the turnpikes with their tolls and hold ups which led them to seek alternative routes. Along the way the importance of manorial waste as drovers sought grazing and respite brings the commons back into focus.

The paucity of surface water away from the spring lines in these porous chalk hills has historically presented serious issues in the supply of uncontaminated drinking water. Susan Maguire’s case study *Water: paucity to potable* gives an intriguing insight into the decision-making process in Woodcote which had a pond that failed to meet the Inspector of Nuisances’ water quality standards. The tiny village lacked the resources to install a pipeline or dig a well (most Chiltern wells are over 300 feet deep), but this essay carefully explains how the community eventually found a workable solution.

*On Common Ground*, Dr Anne-Marie Ford’s fascinating research into families of Romany communities, shows how vital the commons were to the travelling communities as they moved around to the seasonal rhythm of country fairs and festivals. As well as providing camp sites, grazing, and temporary employment on the farms and at the brick kilns, the local common woods provided the raw materials for items to make and sell like pegs and brooms.

Following the centennial anniversary of the start of the Great War, *From Berkhamsted to Battlefield* the concluding essay by Norman Groves investigating the use of Chiltern commons for trench warfare training, is particularly apposite. Several commons were used, but the camp of the Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps on Berkhamsted Common was by far the largest. The size and scale of the camp is brought to life in the photographs. Poignant reminders of the heavy death toll of officers in the war add weight to an important piece of social history. The appendix details a project to map the location and orientation of surviving practice trenches that had been hidden in the undergrowth for many years.

The volunteers who have contributed to this impressive publication have brought together a series of papers where the delight is truly in the detail. The wide-ranging topics explore all manner of life and death on the Chiltern commons, and demonstrate an indefatigable urge to learn more about this unique region and its cultural heritage. These authors have added another layer to the current body of knowledge and they deserve our thanks and congratulations.

Alison Doggett
December 2014
Enclosures in Watlington: the full circle

Laura Mason

In her report, Laura traces the history of enclosures on the high ground in the parish of Watlington and the effects on those who were most dependent on common land - poor agricultural labourers. The history of Watlington also reflects the reaction of society to the loss of common land and our increasing interest in conservation.

In August 1549 William Boolar, a Catholic, of Watlington was sentenced to be hanged in the town for his part as a local ringleader of the Oxfordshire Buckinghamshire Rising. The hanging was to take place on a market day, and Boolar's head to be prominently displayed - a warning to the Watlington population that the consequences of insurrection would be swift and brutal.

The Oxfordshire Buckinghamshire Rising was one of a series of revolts which swept through the English countryside that year. Causes of the disorder included economic distress as a result of enclosure of common land, along with religious differences prompted in part by the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer in June 1549.

In July, rebels including Boolar killed deer in the parks of Sir John Williams at Thame and Rycote, just a few miles from Watlington parish. They drank his cellars dry, and slaughtered his sheep to feast on. They did not hurt Williams - targeted because he had profited from the dissolution of the monasteries - but the killing of deer and sheep could be interpreted as a protest against land enclosures. Action then spread to Oxford itself and to the north of the county. Local landowners would have been on high alert for further trouble.

The Crown's response to rebellion in the Thames Valley so close to the capital had to be quick and decisive. Edward VI noted in his diary

“To Oxfordshire the Lord Grey of Wilton was sent with 1500 horsemen and footmen; whose coming with the assembling of the gentlemen of the countrie, did so abash the rebels, that more than hauf of them ran their ways, and the other that tarried were some slain some taken and some hanged.”

Poet William Forrest, a monk in Thame at the time of the Rising, later wrote of its suppression

“Downe went the Crosse in every countraye, Goddy’s servauntes used with muche crudelytee, Dysmembred (like beastes) in thopen highe waye, Their inwardyes pluckte oute and hartis wheare they laye.”
We do not know how many from Watlington parish were involved in the Rising with the condemned man Boolar, or how many sympathised with the uprising, but the parish must have been alive with news of the rebels and their fate. Townspeople would have witnessed the Crown's retaliation, and Boolar's hanging.

The Rising came close to the end of a period of early enclosures of common land in England which had begun in the medieval period. Very little documentation associated with these enclosures survives, but Watlington in South Oxfordshire was not immune from enclosure during these centuries.

Watlington is a typical long Chilterns strip parish stretching from the Vale of Oxford up into the Chiltern hills, affording residents a mix of arable land, upland pasture and woodland. The town of Watlington is at the foot of the escarpment at the spring line. There are the smaller settlements of Christmas Common, Greenfield, and Seymour Green on the hill above. Until 1931 the Parish also included Warmscombe, separated from the rest of the parish by a strip of land.

Records show that perhaps the first well-documented assault on rights of common in Watlington parish came in the 13th century in 1272. This was when Richard, Earl of Cornwall created a 40 acre deer park from woodland on the hill above the town, where freemen had previously held rights of hunting and grazing. The park was a status symbol for Richard - its establishment required a royal licence, and it would have been expensive to create. It provided Richard, and subsequent owners of the park, with sport and a source of venison. Richard's accounts in the late 13th century record sales of pasture in the park, and the leasing of park land for pannage. It is likely that these transactions were a response to, or pre-empted, disputes over the need for land. The park's size was increased by another 20 acres in 1392.

The loss of common rights resulting from the creation of the deer park came at a time when agricultural resources were under increased pressure due to a population explosion in England. Between 1086 and 1300 the population of England tripled from roughly 1.5 million to between four and five million people. This massive population increase led to the establishment of villages and associated agriculture on marginal land. Common land came under pressure as the value of land increased in England, leading owners to wrest it back.

Between 1315 and 1317 population pressure combined with appalling weather resulted in poor harvests and the great famine, and famine came again in 1321. Some estimates put the death toll of the great famine at up to one quarter of the population, with the peasantry inevitably suffering the worst. On the heels of this hunger came the Black Death in 1348 and Watlington is believed to have suffered badly from this plague, and famine was to return in 1351 and 1369.

Famine and plague depleted the population resulting in a labour shortage, rising wages and falling rents. In many cases this shortage of labour was a good thing for the rural workforce - they could command a higher price for their services, and change their circumstances for the better, moving to wherever they could find higher wages and cheaper rents. Their lords and masters were left short-handed.

Rare surviving manor court documents (quoted by Hassall, 1973) reflect the desertion of the Chilterns countryside, and attempts made by landlords to stem depopulation.
Rotherfield Peppard, a village high in the Chilterns not far from Watlington, court records for 1351 state

"It is ordered that there remain in the lord's hand half a virgate of villein land once occupied by Gilbert Bolle, one virgate of village land called Kelette and half a virgate once occupied by Robert Fairmere...because there are no tenants."

By 1355, Gilbert Bolle amongst others had still not returned. Attempts were made to order villeins back to their lands - in Rotherfield Greys at the May 1355 manor court

"The jury present that William Seman, villein of the lady of the manor, living at Rotherfield Greys (the next parish) and Gilbert Bolle, living at Chesham, Bucks, are natives of the lady but live outside her lordship. So their nearest relations are ordered to make them come and live within the lordship by the time of the next court."

It is a logical assumption that similar desertion was happening in Watlington. In response to the new economic pressures created by famine and plague, landowners turned to sheep farming, which required less labour, as a more profitable enterprise than arable farming. Common land and fields were enclosed for this purpose.

The Black Death and subsequent enclosures are thought to have been possible causes of the disappearance of three settlements in the Watlington parish in the middle ages. The names of these settlements were Ingham, Syresfield, and Watcombe. The Victoria County History concludes that the site of these settlements is now unclear. Some evidence points to Watcombe being located near Howe Hill, and it is very possible that common land, including land on Howe Hill, associated with these lost settlements of the Watlington parish disappeared at this time. The population of Warmscombe is thought to have fallen as a result of sheep farming.

Enclosing common land for sheep farming could result in displacement of the poorest by depriving them of employment and their rights of common. Those who had not had the opportunity to leave the land and better their station in life would suffer. Writing in 1516, 33 years before the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Rising, Thomas More railed against enclosures resulting from sheep farming in his famed work of political philosophy, 'Utopia'. He wrote

"your sheep that were wont to be so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I heard say, be become so great devourers and so wild, that they eat up, and swallow down the very men themselves. They consume, destroy, and devour whole fields, houses, and cities....Therefore that one covetous and unsatiated cormorant and very plague of his native country may compass about and inclose many thousand acres of ground together within one pale or hedge, the husbandmen be thrust out of their own, or else either by coveyne and fraud, or by violent oppression they be put besides it, or by wrongs and injuries they be so wearied, that they be compelled to sell all: by one means therefore or by other, either by hook or crook they must needs depart away, poor, silly, wretched souls...away they trudge, I say, out of their known and accustomed houses, finding no place to rest in. All their household stuff, which is very little worth, though it might well abide the sale, yet being suddenly thrust out, they be constrained to sell it for a thing of nought. And when they have wandered abroad, till that be spent, what can they then else do but steal, and then justly pardy be hanged, or else go about a begging."
Interestingly, we do have some evidence of unrest in Watlington in the later medieval period. On 25th August 1483 there is a report of a riot in the parish involving perhaps 100 men, all well-armed with swords, staves, and bows and arrows. The men committed a premeditated ambush, assaulting a party of gentlemen and their servants and making off with money and gold. More research is needed to uncover the motivation of the mob. Whether poverty resulting from enclosures was partly to blame we cannot say.

The Victoria County History of Watlington states that there was a shortage of pasture in the parish, and we do know that Watlington’s parishioners were trespassing on to the land of neighbouring parishes with several cases recorded from medieval times onwards.

In 1331, 22 people of Watlington were found guilty of trespassing into the neighbouring parish of Stonor, including on to pasture. Records from 1363 show there were 16 instances of trespass on to Stonor’s pasture and, in 1393, four Watlington tenants were found to have ventured on to pasture in Stonor with large flocks of between 40 and 100 sheep each.

According to the Pyrton court rolls, in 1499 a William Gibson, a John Sallet and a Thomas Danby of Watlington were fined for trespassing with their sheep at ‘Burned Heath’. In 1504, also from the Pyrton Court Rolls, the Sallets are still trespassing, with Alicia Sallet of Watlington found to have grazed 600 sheep on Town Field at Pyrton where she had no right.

In 1501 all the tenants of Watlington were accused of grazing cattle and sheep on the lord's common on the hill in Pyrton parish.

In 1517 a group of Watlington men broke into Shambridge Woods outside the parish near Britwell Prior, and pastured their cattle there.

And later still in 1754 at the Court Baron of Sir Edward Simeon of the Manor of Britwell Prior and Britwell Salome it was ordered that

"none of the tenants or inhabitants of Watlington shall drive any sheep from Pegg's Ear Mead's End to Damask Lane upon Britwell Fallow Field upon pain of forfeiting for every default 10 shillings."

Over a decade later in 1766 the same court at Britwell declared again

"We do order that none of the tenants or inhabitants of Watlington should drive any sheep from Pegg's Ear Mead's End to Damask Lane upon Britwell Fallow Field from Parsonage path to Atmarsh upon pain of etc/ - 10s" (O'Sullivan, 1969)

There had also been disputes over Watlington’s rights of common in the woods at Maidensgrove. In 1718 Rawlinson, compiling a history of Oxfordshire, wrote to parish priests in the county to enquire what they knew about the history of their patches. A Robert Horn of Nettlebed returned the following information to Rawlinson

"There is also a common called Minegrove belonging to (Pishill) parish about 500 acres of beechscrubs. Ye lords are Tho. Stonor and Edward Simmons, wch common is now in dispute between Watlington and ye Lords." (Enright, 1951)
The 18th century maps give a clearer picture of where commons were located. Pre-1815 enclosure maps of Watlington parish show several commons on the high ground - on the hill there were adjoining commons at Christmas Common and Northend (Northend Common being in the neighbouring parish of Turville); a common adjacent to Greenfield Farm; one at Seymour Green; and common woodland at Maidensgrove.

Whilst some enclosures had occurred down the centuries, the most extensive enclosures in Watlington came with the Enclosure Act of 1815, which resulted in the division and enclosure of 1,535 acres in the parish. These enclosures marked the beginning of a new more efficient era in agriculture and the end of long held rights of common on the commons at Christmas Common, Greenfield and Seymour Green. Some small compensation for the poor was made in the Act, but it marked the end of an era and heralded a fundamental change to Watlington’s rural economy.

Five years previously in 1810 the common woodland at Maidensgrove had already been enclosed. These woods had provided commoners with the right of estovers. In compensation for this enclosure, 41 acres of the woods were to be rented out and the yield spent on fuel to be distributed amongst the poor of the parish, defined as those whose lands were worth less than £10 per annum. Trustees of the charity, called the Poor’s Allotment Charity, but known locally as the coal charity, were responsible for leasing land and using the income to buy coal for the poor. Any land left unleased was to be sown with furze to be cut for fuel.
19th century enclosures, and the resultant loss of commons, combined with other factors in placing downward pressure on agricultural labourers' living standards.

Farmworkers' wages were suffering the effects of a deflation of agricultural prices, and an increase in the labour supply after the demobilisation of 250,000 troops at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Moreover employers were facing increased rates because of an increased need for poor relief (partly as a result of enclosures), and made further cuts to wages to cover these increased costs.

In Watlington there was an increase in population from 1,479 in 1821 to 1,833 in 1831 and most of the additional parishioners were paupers.

Disentangling the extent to which the loss of common land and the ability to raise their own livestock increased poverty amongst rural labourers at this time, when so many other factors were at play, is difficult. However, we can assume that loss of access to common land made them more dependent on poor relief in tough times.

A further threat to labourers' living standards was the introduction of mechanisation into farming in the form of threshing machines. The machines took winter work away from farm workers, and forced many to apply for poor relief.

In 1830, there was rioting and burning near Greenfield Farm because of the low wages. It seems highly likely that this disturbance was a part of a wider movement known as the Swing Riots. Following a poor harvest in 1830, the Swing Riots broke out across the midlands and the south of England - the area where much recent enclosure had occurred. Agricultural workers rose up in protest in an attempt to better their lot, wrecking machines and burning farm property in the name of 'Captain Swing', a character invented by the rioters to embody their plight. Captain Swing was a tenant farmer driven to bankruptcy by recent social and political change.

There were also riots and destruction at nearby villages including Benson, Newington and Little Milton during this period.

The fate of the rioters at Greenfield is not clear, but Swing rioters were commonly imprisoned or transported to Australia. Many of them were aboard the Eliza which sailed for Hobart from Portsmouth in February 1831. There is a record of a Watlington-born man aboard this ship, Joseph Ring, convicted of destroying a threshing machine at Little Milton.

Certainly transportation records provide great insight into rural poverty in the 19th century. We can find in these records stories of desperate people turning to crime to escape hunger and the workhouse in this period.
Most of those from Watlington sentenced to transportation had previous convictions for theft, and had already served time in England’s overcrowded prisons. However, their thefts were usually of food or clothing, and simply tell sad stories of desperation and grinding poverty amongst rural labourers.

Perhaps one of the saddest tales came to court in 1832, when those bad harvests had increased hunger. Widower and father of eight, Benjamin Gearing of Watlington was charged with stealing two quarters of beans from a Watlington barn, and transported to Hobart. Five of his children were forced to enter Henley Workhouse, their mother being dead and their father transported.

In 1832 James and John Jarratt were charged with killing a sheep belonging to Moses Wiggins of Watlington. James was transported and records show that an Ann Jarratt, aged three, applied for poor relief following her father’s transportation, and was granted one shilling per week.

Another illustration of the hunger which descended on Watlington during this period was the case of John Smith who stole ‘several quantities of grocery goods’ from Watlington grocer George Churchill in 1831, and for that was brought before Oxford Assizes and sentenced to be transported for seven years (Richmond, 2007).

Ten years later unemployment and poverty were still causing social problems, including poaching, in the area. A correspondent wrote to the Oxford Journal in 1842

“It is deplorable to see so many able-bodied men sent to crowd the county gaol on a charge of poaching and greatly to be feared that, in many instances, they are driven to commit their crime for want of employment. What are our surveyors about? Our roads are in a disgraceful state whilst scores of unemployed are left to the alternative of starving or becoming the inmates of a gaol or workhouse.”

This reliance on poaching and poor relief is well illustrated by the Rockall family of Watlington.

In November 1835 a Daniel Rockall, aged 35, of Watlington parish, his wife, and their five children aged between one and ten, applied to Henley Workhouse for poor relief. Daniel was recorded as ill. The poor law union granted the family three gallons of bread and 2lbs of mutton. In early December they received further relief. By the end of December 1835, Workhouse records reveal that Daniel was in prison. His wife and children were granted 2 shillings and 3 gallons of bread per week.

Over a decade later Rockall was still running risks to feed his family. In February 1848 three men from Christmas Common - William Trendall, Daniel Rockall and Thomas Rockall - were fined for poaching on Pyrton Common.

This was not the first time the Rockall name had been associated with poaching. The loss of commons in 1815 had reduced available land where the poor could trap or net game, and the introduction of the Game Laws in 1816 had increased the penalties for poaching. In 1818, just three years after the 1815 Enclosure Act, a Rockall, along with Richard and William Slatter were discovered by a gamekeeper in Clare Copse on the Earl of Macclesfield’s land armed with pistols and cutlasses. Their intent was to poach pheasants, but on being approached, Richard Slatter aimed his gun at the keeper and threatened to kill him. For this, Richard was sentenced to seven years transportation, whilst William Slatter and Rockall received sentences of twelve months imprisonment with hard labour. Between
1818 and 1821 Slatter was held in prison hulks, including the Justicia at Woolwich, awaiting transportation. In January 1821 he was pardoned, having never left British shores.

The transportation records also reveal a fascinating glimpse into the Maidensgrove woods following their enclosure. We can surmise from the following that parishioners would still gather fuel from the local woodlands which were not without perils at this time. Hannah Randall lived in the first cottage on the right on top of Howe Hill with her husband William, a farm labourer. One July morning in 1844 she rose early to hang out her husband’s corduroy trousers on the washing line at the side of the cottage. She then went into the woods to gather kindling to boil a kettle. She noticed a man coming alone up Howe Hill, and he eventually passed her by, as she continued to gather wood. A few minutes later she returned to her cottage to find the trousers had disappeared from the washing line. Bravely she gave chase to the man she had seen, running after him into ‘Maidensgrove scrubs’ (Richmond, 2007). As she pursued him she saw him throw something into the trees. She caught up with him and accused him of the theft. He proclaimed his innocence and tried to blame the theft on two men he said he had followed up the hill, telling her he had seen them throw something into the trees. She certainly had not spotted those men so she recovered the trousers, and sought a warrant for the man’s arrest. His name was William Towns and he pleaded not guilty to the theft, but the judge believed Hannah’s version of events. Towns was sentenced to seven years transportation. He died in Hobart in 1881.

But poverty didn’t only increase crime – it also inspired families to seek alternative sources of income. We could argue that previously they had access to an income through grazing rights on the common - this was now gone. During the 19th century increasing numbers of women and children from the age of five were engaged in lacemaking to make ends meet. This was piece work performed in the home, and controlled by lace merchants who sold the output in London. This cottage industry was at its peak in the early 19th century, but was largely replaced by industrial manufacture in the latter half of the century. There are reports of a lacemaking school at Watlington attended by 30 or 40 girls in 1840, and even later in the century in 1887 a Gazetteer entry by John Bartholomew describes lacemaking as the principal industry of the town, along with brewing.

By the 1860s the enclosure movement had run its course in England, and was coming up against increasing opposition from those who felt that there was a decreasing amount of common land to provide access to open space for recreation and health benefits to Britain’s increasingly industrialised society.

The Commons Preservation Society, the aims of which were to protect common land and public rights of way for all, was formed in 1864. Founding members of the society included Sir Robert Hunter, social reformer Octavia Hill, philosopher John Stuart Mill and William Morris. Hill and Hunter went on to develop the idea of a trust to acquire places of historic significance or natural beauty for the benefit of the nation. Hill thought of naming the trust ‘The Commons and Gardens Trust’, but Hunter suggested the National Trust, and this came into being in 1895.

Enclosures decimated the commons of Watlington and today there is only one surviving piece of officially registered common land in Watlington at the chalk pits, a 1.22 hectare site, 1.25 km south east of the town. This common is owned by South Oxfordshire District Council, and leased to Watlington Parish Council. Chalk quarried from the pits would have been used in road construction and building. Many old houses and walls in the area include chalk stone, or clunch as it is known.
Today the Chalk Pits are a designated Local Nature Reserve incorporating chalk grassland, scrub and woodland. The site is cared for by Watlington Environment Group on behalf of the parish council. Watlington Chalk Pits are largely within the Watlington and Pyrton Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The parish continues to benefit from the Poor’s Allotment Charity, formed after the enclosure of Maidensgrove woods. Coals were distributed biannually from 1823 into the 1950s. Into the late 20th century small cash sums were still being distributed at Christmas.

Then, in the 1990s the coffers of the Charity were swelled by a large bequest of land and buildings upon the death of a resident of Pishill who had formerly been a tenant of the Charity’s land at Maidensgrove. Some of the proceeds from the sale of this bequest were used to buy the site of the old Watlington hospital - now the Watlington Care Home - on behalf of the town. The Poor’s Allotment Charity changed its name to the Watlington Support Fund in 2005. The Fund, which amalgamated the coal charity with two smaller charities, is used to provide grants to those in hardship and distress, and to the sick, disabled and convalescent of the parish in need of financial aid.

Although Watlington’s history has been one of decreasing common land, the parish has been fortunate to benefit from a significant gift to the National Trust. The Brett family, previously of Watlington Park, made a succession of gifts to the National Trust in the 20th century, resulting in National Trust ownership of, and thus open access to, Watlington Hill, Greenfield Copse, Lower Dean Wood and Howe Wood. Greenfield Copse forms part of Watlington Park, which brings the story of enclosure full circle in the sense that the creation of Watlington Park in 1272 is where the story of enclosure in the parish began.

This National Trust land is a mosaic of chalk grassland habitat, scrub and woodland which supports a diversity of plants, insects and animals. It includes a nationally important yew wood, an abandoned orchard and beech trees. Now that sheep no longer keep invasive scrub away, volunteers and the Trust maintain the site, with the aid of deer, rabbits and ants.

So, with the gift of Watlington Hill to the National Trust, Watlington has in a sense regained land for use by the people, albeit for leisure and conservation purposes rather than farming, survival and subsistence. At this stage we cannot accurately say exactly which parts of the Hill were used as common land prior to medieval enclosure, but that at least parts of it were common is almost certain.

The last word must go to English author and dramatist, Mary Russell Mitford whose poem entitled ‘Watlington Hill’, published in 1812, describes coursing with greyhounds on the hill with a party from Shirburn Castle. Her words contain an appreciation of the landscape that visitors to Watlington Hill will identify with today.

“If ye would have all hope can bring,
Take the first morn of early spring!
If ye would warm your life-blood chill,
Go course on Watlington’s fair hill!”

“Leave we them all: to stand awhile
Upon the topmost brow,
And mark how many a length’ning mile
The landscape spreads below.”
Acknowledgements

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The Oxford Journal newspaper
Appendix

Walks in Watlington Parish

This appendix includes descriptions of three easy circular walks in the parish of Watlington. Discover some of the places mentioned in Laura’s report while enjoying varied views.

All three circular walks start and finish at the National Trust car park at the top of Watlington Hill, a short distance from the crossroads at Christmas Common.

- On **Walk 1**, which is 2½ miles, you will see spectacular old boundary banks as you walk through areas of former common land.

- On **Walk 2**, which is 3 miles, you will discover Watlington Hill and Park while enjoying extensive views, especially on a clear day.

- **Walk 3** is 6 miles, but options for two shorter walks of 2½ and 4 miles are also described. The full walk will take you through ancient woodland, to the site of the Swing Riots and along an ancient drovers’ track.

The walks can also be combined if you’d like an even longer walk.

The routes follow paths across fields and through woods. There are some stiles on Walks 2 and 3 and some paths on these walks are steep. Take care when walking short stretches on, or crossing, country lanes. Wear suitable footwear and allow time to rest and enjoy the views. Map: OS Explorer 171.

You will pass, or be close to, the Fox and Hounds pub in Christmas Common (01491 612599). There are also pubs, shops and a café in Watlington.

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Walk 1: Common Boundary Banks

This 2½ mile circular walk starts and finishes at the National Trust car park at the top of Watlington Hill, a short distance from the crossroads at Christmas Common.

This fairly level route follows footpaths across fields and through woods. Some paths can be muddy in places. There are no stiles. Take care when walking the short distances on country lanes.

1. From the car park turn right and walk to the junction. Bear right towards Christmas Common. Walk with care here.

2. Just before the next junction, look for the path on the left next to the 30mph sign. Follow the grassy path, bearing right, then left, following the white arrows, passing a house on the right. Here the path becomes a track which leads straight on. Continue into woodland until you reach a junction with painted arrows on the trees. Turn right.

This area was part of the old common land belonging to Pyrton which was sold when the open commons were enclosed. Look out for a mixture of trees, including yew and oak. Some have been coppiced, ie cut at ground level. The size of the multiple trunks that have re-grown shows that this took place many years ago.

After a short distance in this open woodland you will reach a large bank. Pause here to notice the different vegetation on the other side of the bank. The beech trees are tall and straight and there is little ground vegetation. In contrast to the variety of vegetation you have just walked through, this area has been wooded and managed for either fuel or for chair making for hundreds of years.

3. Bear right and follow the path alongside the bank passing large pits which are probably old quarries. Continue straight on, ignoring the path going off to the left. You can follow the bank for a good distance until the path turns right, leaving the bank.

The bank marks the ancient boundary of the edge of common land which stretched from the top of Watlington...
Hill to Northend and also the boundary between Watlington and Shirburn parishes. The bank varies in size now but you can see it on your right as you walk, still clearly marking these ancient boundaries.

The field on your right beyond the woodland edge probably originated as smaller fields taken from rough woodland or common land many centuries ago. Notice the old field maple and ash trees along this field edge, still marking the common edge.

The path turns right and follows the line of a wire fence, and continues to the road.

On the right of the path, there is still a small bank and old trees along the old common and field boundary. Coopers Wood is on the left. It is different again to the other woodland seen along the path with a mixture of species and open spaces. A map dated 1840 shows that this area was part of the common, but, by 1883, the common was enclosed and Coopers Wood was mixed woodland as it still is today.

For a shorter walk, you can turn right along the road to return to Christmas Common. Walk with care.

At the road, cross with care and enter the field through a kissing gate. Follow the arrows right across the field to another gate, then diagonally left down the next field to the gate into woodland.

The fields you cross were part of Northend Common, which joined Christmas Common. In the summer there are plentiful flowers and grasses in these fields.

At the bottom of the field, go through the kissing gate and continue straight on through the wood until you reach a rough track.

Here you can either turn right to return to the road junction or continue straight across for a short distance, following signs for the Oxfordshire Way, before bearing right through fairly open woodland. The path emerges on the road, next to the old church.

This woodland area is part of Pyrton parish, showing how complicated ancient parish boundaries can be. This originated from the need for each parish to have access to a variety of natural resources, such as soils, timber and grazing.

The first wood you walk through, Prior’s Grove, belonged to the Deans and Canons of Christchurch in 1850. Across the rough track, the wood is Queen’s Wood, owned by the Deans and Canons of Windsor. In 1850, these woods were recorded as beech but now also contain conifers and some other species. The track is also interesting: in 1850 it was called the Driftway, meaning that animals were driven along it. It leads to Hollandridge Lane and ultimately to Henley-on-Thames.

At the road, turn right, walk past the Fox and Hounds pub to the road junction. Turn left to return to the National Trust car park.
Walk 2: Watlington Hill and Park

This 3 mile circular walk starts and finishes at the National Trust car park at the top of Watlington Hill, a short distance from the crossroads at Christmas Common. Watlington Hill is a special place as it has rare or important plants, trees and wildlife, some of which you will see on this walk.

This route follows footpaths mainly through woodland. Some paths are steep and can be muddy in places. Be aware of traffic when walking the short distances on country lanes.

1 Park at the National Trust car park near Christmas Common.
Take the narrow footpath in the left corner of the car park and follow the white arrows. Go through a gate and continue downhill.

On a map dating from 1876-77, the line of huge beech trees on the left are shown to continue along the modern National Trust boundary to the bottom of the hill. They mark the edge of the common land. The land on the left of your path was shown as open ground at this time with no woodland.

Looking across the valley you can see Lower Dean Wood which was once part of Watlington deer park. You will go through this wood later in the walk.

2 The path leads through woodland and through a kissing gate. Continue straight on with woodland on the right.

The path runs along a holloway which has been worn down over the centuries previously by sheep and now by walkers. The woodland on the right here (shown as a narrow strip in the 1870s) is beech mixed with scattered yew trees, some conifers and whitebeam. The conifers are shown as a plantation on a later map dated between 1880 and 1913.

Through the kissing gate, the woodland on the right becomes mainly yew with some beech. This is an uncommon type of woodland which only occurs in a few places in the south of England. Yew bark is glowing brown and peeling, with small straight needles growing in two rows each side of the stem; the needles are dark and shiny on the top and greyish underneath. The trunks often have many new shoots springing out of them, especially when they have been cut. Yew lives to a great age, and has been growing here for many centuries. Yew is very poisonous, but is now an important component of anti-cancer drugs. It is a conifer, like a fir tree, but doesn't bear cones. The male and female flowers are on different trees, the female trees producing seeds (again poisonous) which are contained in red fleshy, berry-like structures called arils. Blackbirds and other birds eat these which
helps to spread the seeds. In the autumn, look for the red arils of the yew which look like little jewels, scattered on the white leaves on the ground fallen from whitebeam trees.

Yew timber is obvious with its bright red-brown colouration. It has a fine grain which feels smooth to touch and has been used for many centuries due to its strength and durability. It was famous for making long bows and handles for tools. The oldest example of its use is a yew spear head, dating to about 450,000 years ago, one of the oldest wooden finds in the world.

3 There is a parallel path on the left through this area which leads to the same kissing gate at the bottom of the hill as the holloway.

On the left of the holloway, the ground is more open with shrubs, grass and flowers. In the summer, the flowery grass is full of butterflies, some quite rare, and bees feeding on the pollen and nectar. These plants grow especially on chalky ground so are not seen everywhere.

4 At the bottom of the hill, the path reaches a wooden kissing gate. Continue through this straight on between hedges and through gates until you reach a junction with a house on the left. Turn left along the track until you reach another junction.

5 Continue straight on climbing up a grassy field to the gate where you turn left.

If you pause at the top, you can see a good view of Watlington Hill and the obvious dark green yew woodland. Below to the right, you can see Lower Dean Wood, originally part of the old deer park. The grassy field was shown as a much smaller open area on the 1870s map, surrounded by woodland which linked to the woodland you will walk through. On a clear day you can see across Oxfordshire, although the iconic towers of Didcot Power Station are no longer the landmark they used to be.

6 The path continues into woodland and is marked by white arrows. Follow the obvious path.

A little further along you can catch a glimpse of part of Watlington Park House on the right. The original house here was built in 1632, but replaced in the 1750s and altered several times since then.

This National Trust beech woodland used to contain many conifers, shown on the 1870s map. The end of the National Trust woodland is marked by two posts and, as the path levels, there are other tree species to be seen. Cherry trees have white flowers in spring but can also be identified by horizontal lines on their shiny bark. The most impressive trees are huge, straight oak trees which are many hundreds of years old. They almost look like elephants standing amongst the other vegetation! Sweet chestnut trees can also be seen - their very prickly seed cases protect the nuts inside. The climate is too cool in England to produce full sized chestnuts so the ones we buy to eat are mainly imported.

7 The path reaches a tarmac drive. Here turn left and continue to the gateway. At the road, turn left to Christmas Common village, and then left again at the junction to go back to the car park.
Walk 3: Watlington Park and Greenfield

This 6 mile circular walk starts and finishes at the National Trust car park at the top of Watlington Hill, a short distance from the crossroads at Christmas Common. Two shorter walks of 2½ and 4 miles are also described.

The route follows footpaths across fields and through woods. Some paths are steep and can be muddy in places and there are some stiles. Take care when walking the short distances on country lanes.

1 From the car park, turn right along the road until you come to a large metal gate on the right. Go through the gate, bear right at the arrow and go through a small wooden gate. Follow the path downhill between hedges and a wire fence.

The path leads downhill through old scrub with many hawthorn trees. This area was originally grassland and the trees have grown as grazing has ceased. Further along on the right you will see a large grassy field stretching down the valley; a map of Watlington parish made in 1800 shows this area divided into seven fields.

2 The path continues along the edge of mature woodland with a hedge on the right; it gradually levels out.

This wood is Lower Dean Wood and here the path has a large obvious bank on the left which marks the old woodland edge. It probably also marks the edge of Watlington Park which was created by Richard, Earl of Cornwall in 1272. Prior to the formation of the park, the land was used for common grazing and for hunting by freemen. There are old yew trees here, as well as plants such as dog’s mercury which indicate ancient woodland, so it is possible that this woodland was in existence when the park was created.

After you leave the woodland, you will reach the hamlet of Lower Dean. In 1883 a well was recorded here but there were no houses. The name Dean comes from the old English word denu which means valley, so very apt for this area!
3 Continue along the track until you reach a junction. Turn right here to continue to Greenfield.

**Shorter Walk**

For a shorter walk of 2½ miles, turn left to walk up through Watlington Park. **(NOTE the track in front of you is not a public path.)**

A Turn left and follow the wide grassy path uphill. At the top, go through the gate and turn left. It is worth pausing here to see a good view of Watlington Hill and the route you have just walked downhill alongside the old park. The dark green trees opposite Watlington Hill are yew.

A little further along you can catch a glimpse of part of Watlington Park House on the right. The original house here was built in 1632, but replaced in the 1750s and altered again since then.

B The path is marked by white arrows as it continues into woodland. Notice the beech trees here, but as the path levels there are other species. Cherry trees have white flowers in spring but can also be identified by horizontal lines on their shiny bark. The most impressive trees are huge straight oaks which are many hundreds of years old. They almost look like elephants standing amongst the other vegetation!

C The path reaches a tarmac drive which continues to the gateway. Here turn left and walk to the road. Turn left to Christmas Common village, then left again at the junction to go back to the car park.

The area past Lower Dean is shown on a pre-inclosure map dated around 1800. It was a large open field called Howe Field which stretched down to the Icknield Way and up to the hamlet of Howe. You will see it again as you walk up the track to the woods (point 4).

4 When you reach the road, turn left and walk with care, along the verge if possible. Opposite a house and black barn called Dumble Dore on the right, take the footpath on your left, over a stile. Turn right and follow the track parallel to the hedge towards woodland.

At the woodland edge near a stile, look out for a view of Howe Farm on the right. This hamlet has ancient roots - it was mentioned in 12th century documents.

5 At a metal gate in the woods, cross a track and bear left at the footpath junction. Follow the white arrows on the trees.

This is Greenfield Copse, a typical Chiltern beech wood now owned by the National Trust. It is ancient woodland which means that it has been continuously wooded since 1600. It has been managed for different uses over the centuries but has never been cleared. In 1616 the woodland here was surveyed. It had pollarded beech (ie cut above the height of grazing animals and allowed to grow from this cut), saleable oak and young hazel. Look out for these trees as you walk.

At the top of the hill where the path is level, you are likely to see bluebells flowering in the spring; later in the year you will see the silvery remains of the flower stalks.

6 **For a shorter walk** of 4 miles, you can turn left here along the road to return to Christmas Common. Walk with care.

The path leads to a solid wooden gate which opens on to the road, opposite Greenfield. Cross the road with care from the wooden gate to the farm. Look for the bridleway sign on a post under the big tree. Walk to the left of the large barns and along a gravel track with cottages on the left and a large garden on the right. Continue between large hedges downhill.

People have been living in the hamlet of Greenfield since the early Middle Ages. Edward Horne, who lived here in 1764, created the “white mark” in the shape of an obelisk on Watlington Hill. In 1830, Greenfield was the site of rioting and burning during the time of the Swing Riots in protest against rural poverty and the loss of common pasture here, which was enclosed in 1815. Greenfield Farm is now famous for its Christmas trees.
Continue into woodland, walking downhill with the field just visible on your left. At the bottom of the slope, turn left following the W19 white arrows.

These woods (like many others in this area) were managed for centuries producing firewood, materials for building and farming and later, in the 19th century, wood for chair making too.

At the next junction turn left, then almost immediately just opposite the field take a narrow flinty path on the right, marked with white arrows. Follow the path uphill through woodland, finally leading down to a wide open area of tracks.

The wide track along the valley bottom follows the line of the ancient parish boundary between Watlington and Pyrton. In AD 744 it was mentioned in a boundary charter for King Offa (of Offa’s Dyke fame).

Cross to the path (PS8 CW) almost opposite. (NOTE this path is slightly hidden so you may have to look for it!) The narrow path climbs uphill and eventually reaches a stile crossing from the woodland into a grassy field. Walk straight on to the gateway to reach another ancient track, Hollandridge Lane.

(If you turn right on the track for a few moments you can see Hollandridge Farm. The farm here dates back to at least 1282 when it was owned by Emma Herlinggerruge. The family name still remains for the house and the lane. The farm buildings date back to the early 18th century and are shown on a Stonor Estate map of 1725. The ancient oak tree nearby is probably older than the buildings.)

From the gateway, turn left to walk along Hollandridge Lane until you reach the road on the edge of Christmas Common. Walk with care and follow the road straight on to the junction signposted left to Watlington. From here, follow the road back to the National Trust car park.

As you walk uphill along Hollandridge Lane you may notice banks on each side, which show the antiquity of this route. Some banks are further from the present track which must have been wider in the past. As the path levels out, the woodland on each side is managed by the Forestry Commission. It is ancient woodland, meaning it has been wooded since at least 1600. During the 20th century this woodland was planted with conifers, but they have recently been removed to return the woodland to its original state.
Introduction

For over 500 years, religious dissent and nonconformity have played an important role in the social evolution of communities in the Chilterns. Much has changed over the centuries and religious attitudes have become more relaxed. In the Tudor era, dissenting Lollards were persecuted, imprisoned and even burnt at the stake, whereas today there are many nonconformist communities actively worshipping in chapels built on the Chiltern commons and playing an important role in the everyday lives of their communities.

A comprehensive study of the impact of nonconformity on the Chilterns is clearly an immense challenge given that it covers 500 years. I have, therefore, made extensive use of extracts from the many books, articles and published papers written both about nonconformity and the Chilterns and its commons. All extracts are referenced as an aid to further reading and acknowledgement is made to all of the authors. My wife, Jane, kindly provided the sketches and I took the photos unless indicated otherwise.

Thanks are due to the Chilterns Commons Project for commissioning this study and to its many volunteers for contributing additional information which has been invaluable.

Early dissent - The Lollard Martyrs - up to 1550

Religious dissent has been a feature of the Chilterns since at least the 14th century, when Lollards used the woods and commons as places of refuge from persecution.

The Lollard movement was initiated by the “poor priest” followers of Wycliffe who, after his death in 1384, spread out from Oxford into the “small uplandish towns” with the aim of challenging the passive acceptance of clerical authority in interpreting the teachings of the Bible.

“Clad in russet gowns, with bare feet, they travelled with staff in hand from town to town, preaching in churches when allowed, or otherwise in the churchyard, street or market place like Wesley’s itinerants four centuries later.” [1]

Over the centuries, religious and civil dissent have often been associated. The late 14th century was notable as a period of civil unrest resulting from wage regulation and food prices in the aftermath of the Black Death; many of Wycliffe’s opponents declared that the civil unrest had been incited by the “poor priests”.

By the 15th century, Lollards had become well established in the Chilterns, enjoying varying degrees of toleration by the established Church. But this was not to last - in the early part of the 16th century, under the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, the movement suffered increasing persecution.
Amersham was a notable centre of Lollardry in the early 16th century. Lollards from Amersham and Chesham were imprisoned in the Bishop of Lincoln’s palace at Wooburn in the early 1500s, and some were even burnt at the stake - one of the most notable martyrs being William Tylsworth:

“In 1506 the Amersham Lollards attracted the attention of Bishop Smith of Lincoln who instituted proceedings against them. Amersham was of importance as it was a favourite place for wayfarers travelling to and from London and news from the metropolis would reach it quickly. Thomas Grove of London, butcher, William Glasbroke of Harrow, Christopher Glasbroke of London and William Tylsworth of London, goldsmith, used to resort and confer together of matters of religion in the house of Thomas Man of Amersham about this time. These visitors from London would be glad of a secluded spot in which to confer, William Tylsworth was burned at the stake in Amersham in 1506.”

“Many of the Chiltern Lollards attending the Amersham meetings at that time did so covertly but kept their views very private in their home towns and villages. One of them was John Philip from Hughendon, described as a physician. He is said to have been “very ripe in the scriptures” and had a very valuable collection of books which he burned when he found himself in danger of arrest.” [2]

The martyrs’ memorial in Amersham records the death of William Tylsworth and other Lollard martyrs.

There are few records of religious dissent in the Chilterns during the latter half of the 16th century under the reign of Elizabeth I. However, research has shown that families with Lollard ancestry were much less mobile than other families in the Chilterns and that there were strong family connections between the Lollards of the 16th century and the Baptists and Quakers of the 17th century:

“The surnames of families who were both Lollards and post restoration (17th century) Dissenters in the Chilterns demonstrated that these families were outstandingly and entirely abnormally stable in the area. This was true even when they were compared with the wealthiest section of rural society there, which is usually the most static. The mobility, or rather lack of it, of radical dissenting families in the Chilterns was ‘different’ from anyone else. Radical dissent was a family affair.” [3]
By the time of the death of Elizabeth I, in 1603, England had become a wealthy and confident nation with a very well established social order, particularly in rural areas such as the Chilterns. At the top of the social order were the nobility, the gentry and the established Anglican Church; below them were the yeomen farmers and other landowners, and at the bottom were the craftsmen, tenant farmers and labourers. Within that social order there was inevitably religious and civil conflict.

Throughout this period religious dissent was active across the Chilterns. Many of the dissenters were yeomen farmers, labourers and shepherds; and these same people also engaged in civil dissent against the landowners and nobility.

At Caddington Common in the northern Chilterns, the pressure of food demands from a rapidly increasing population encouraged landowners to attempt to enclose common land for agriculture and this created civil disturbances which were exacerbated by the relative weakness of the established Anglican Church.

“In 1635 an attempt was made to enclose Caddington Common and plough the land for crops, forcing the commoners off the land which they had grazed for centuries. In retribution Miles Matthews, a shepherd, drove 160 sheep into John Cushie’s oats; when reprimanded Matthews threatened that “he would knock Cushie down and pick his teeth with his staff.”

“The parishes of the northern Chilterns were notorious for their nonconformity ... perhaps the most telling demonstration of the relationship between religious dissent and resistance to enclosure is the fact that the six Quakers sentenced to fourteen years’ transportation in 1665 had been convicted of illegal assembly in a barn on Caddington Common.” [4]

Another centre of dissent was Wooburn, south of High Wycombe, where Lord Wharton was a prominent dissident.

“Philip, Lord Wharton, was one of the leaders of the puritan party in the days of Charles II. His chapel at Wooburn became a focal point for worshippers: ‘thither came puritans from Wycombe and Farnham and other places; one can see them in the dress of the period, with their steeple crowned hats and their short coats coming down the hillside or crossing the green, not in large groups but singly, stealthily picking their way to avoid observation.” [5]

“The records of Puritan feeling in the southern Chilterns during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, though comparatively scanty, show that Puritanism met with influential support from the country gentry and others. Early in the reign of Charles I, a series of letters written by Dr John Andrews, rector of Beaconsfield, show that South Bucks was,
as he expresses it, “foully tainted with puritanism”. Thomas Valentine of Chalfont St Giles and Elkanah Gladman of Chesham were suspended from their livings for not reading the Book of Sports.” [6]

The execution of Charles I and the creation of the Commonwealth, in 1649, then saw a revival of puritanism, in particular the repeal of the Act of Uniformity in 1650 [Appendix 2] which removed many constraints on nonconformist worship. By that time the General Baptist Church of Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring had become well established.

“The General Baptist Church of Berkhamsted, later known as the church of Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring, was founded in or soon after 1640, and by 1654 at the latest it formed part of a well organized denomination. The General Baptists held that the way of salvation is not confined to particular persons, but is open to all, because Christ died for all, and the Holy Spirit strives with all, so that if any perish their destruction is of universal redemption.”

“The General Baptist system of church order and discipline was much more structured than that of the Particular, or Calvinist Baptists, with whom they had originally very little to do.” [7]

Other Baptist churches were being formed in the northern Chitherns; the one at Kensworth, particularly, attracted a congregation from a large surrounding area.

“This cause began in the 1650s and in its early days had groups of members not only in Bedfordshire but also in north Hertfordshire [Kensworth was in Hertfordshire until 1897]. Among churches springing from the Kensworth one are those at Park Street, Luton and at Dagnall Street, Saint Albans.” [8]

The fortunes of puritanism were reversed again with the restoration of the monarchy when Charles II returned to England in 1660. To ensure high Anglican dominance, persecution of dissenters re-started. The Five Mile Act was introduced in 1665 [Appendix 2]. It prohibited clergymen from coming within five miles of a fixed point in the Parish (generally the Church) from which they had been banished. At Tring the members of the Baptist church had to retreat to the woods.

“In 1666 the Five Mile Act came into force. Records state that “the little church at New Mill had to leave their retired meeting house and go into the woods to worship God for fear of their persecutors”. Their night time place was discovered and Richard Sutton, their minister, was arrested and sent to prison until the death of Charles II. With the accession of James II, Richard Sutton was freed and New Mill chapel was reopened.” [9]
The Quakers were particularly persecuted during the reign of Charles II but, despite being persecuted, they grew in strength and in 1668 founded the Upperside Monthly Meeting, centred on Thomas Ellwood’s home at Coleshill. This encompassed Quaker congregations across a large area of the Chilterns and surrounding areas of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire and played an important social as well as a religious role.

“Notice having been given of the loss to have befallen Elizabeth Crutch of Prestwood near Missenden by fire, there was brought in towards her assistance £5 4s 4d, which money was committed to Samuel Troan of Wickham to lay out in household goods for the said Eliza Crutch…..Tho Dell did on behalf of Wooburn meeting make complaint that the meeting was overcharged with poor beyond the reasonable ability of the Friends there.” [10]

Charles II died in 1685 and was succeeded by his Catholic leaning brother James II who abdicated in 1688 in favour of the protestant William of Orange. Following William’s accession, the fortunes of puritanism were reversed once again when Parliament passed the Toleration Act in 1688 [Appendix 2]. This allowed freedom of worship to nonconformists who had pledged to the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy - they were allowed their own places of worship and their own teachers.

It is of note that these early 17th century developments have set the scene for the evolution of nonconformist worship in the Chilterns for several hundred years: Quakers centred on Coleshill, Baptists active in the Tring/Berkhamsted/Chesham area, Independents and Congregationalists in the southern Chilterns, and a mixture of Quakers and Baptists on the Hertfordshire/Bedfordshire border.

The first half of the 18th century was a relatively quiet and peaceful time in rural areas of England. The zeal and radicalism of 17th century nonconformists diminished under the reign of the protestant House of Hanover and many of the Quakers, Baptists and Congregationalists, particularly in rural areas, tended to become self contained and closely knit groups who often indulged in internal disputes and were often intolerant of, and made little impact on, the community at large. In particular they seemed to have had little impact on the general drunkenness and disorder in the remote settlements on the commons.

By contrast, the nonconformists in the Chiltern towns were more actively building chapels, expanding into the neighbouring rural areas and attempting to establish basic schools in some settlements.

Both the Quakers and the Baptists maintained strict rules on their membership during the 18th century, particularly an insistence that both parties to a marriage should be members of their respective sects - which deterred many of the younger members and was a factor influencing a decline in membership.
“David Bovingdon & Eliz: Crutch came again for the Answer of the Meeting to their proposition. And the Meeting (upon Inquiry) understanding yt ye man had been but very lately convinced, & come but little among Friends, & judging it both most advantageous for him to seek first ye kingdom of God, & some growth and establishmt. in ye way yt leads therto; & also more orderly & becoming ye gravity of Truth, advised them to forbear for a while, & wait to feel ye power of God bringing them more into, & establishing them in Truth.” [11]

“The same day our brother John Benham made his appearance before the Church desiring to be received into fellowship again who had been withdrawn from by the Church for disordering himself by drinking too much and for marrying with an unbaptised person contrary to his covenant in his baptism....Not being sensible of his sin he still standeth withdrawn from by the Church and is again admonished to repent.” [12]

The problems of alcohol were clearly a challenge. Many nonconformist communities maintained a strict adherence to temperance but others may not have been so diligent - as illustrated by life in Foxton, a Hertfordshire village to the east of the Chilterns.

“There seems to have been a period when in some villages, of which Foxton is one, there were neither ale sellers or pubs - roughly between 1660 and 1730. Has this gap anything to do with Puritanism and Nonconformity? Not in the least. Several prominent citizens had part of their premises designated as 'drinkhouse', notably Nathaniel Singleton - and Singleton was the most rabid Dissenter of them all. They all had their tubs and barrels and coppers and vats and skimmers. Including the vicar. This was the heyday of 'home brewed' ale.” [13]

In some communities, the nonconformists did attempt to address social problems by establishing basic schools, but often these attempts were short lived as demonstrated by the episcopal returns for Studham between 1709 and 1720.

1709: “A Schole [sic], as above.” This cryptic reference seems to relate to an earlier entry concerning families in the parish in which it was stated that there were 45 and another 24 in 'Merket street' [Markyate Street]. The entry goes on to state that there were two monthly meetings of “Anabaptists” [probably Baptists], one at Markyate Street and one “within half a mile of the church”. Perhaps one, or both, of these meetings ran a school.”

1717: “One Charity [School]. No fixt [sic] and certain number of Children but as the poor people can spare them from their necessary service at home. The teacher John Howard.”

1720: “There is no such School.” [14]
In contrast to the remote rural areas, nonconformists maintained a more visible and active presence in the main towns of the Chilterns with Baptist chapels built in Amersham (1677), Princes Risborough (1708) and High Wycombe (1709), and Congregational chapels built in High Wycombe (1714) and Chesham (1724). Joseph Winch’s house in Amersham was enlarged in 1689 to accommodate a Quaker Meeting House.

The Baptists in Chesham and Berkhamsted were also active during this period, establishing preaching stations in nearby Chiltern settlements such as Frithsden and Chartridge and extending their influence to settlements as far away as Naphill.

“Adam Taylor writing in 1818 suggested that the Berkhamsted Baptist Church was formed during the Protectorate and that by 1700 was in a ‘flourishing state’ numbering one hundred members. During the seventeenth century, followers, always prone to prosecution and payment of fines, met at member’s homes or farm outbuildings in the outlying villages and hamlets of Berkhamsted. Francis Duncombe, the vicar of Ivinghoe reporting in 1669, noted that the Anabaptist meetings at George Catherall’s house in St. Margaretts were ‘great and grand’ and that ‘one Neel of Freezden’ is their teacher.”

“In that same year, Nehemiah Neale is listed as being a ‘preacher and teacher’ at the house of Richard Stringer, ‘a joyner of Redbourne’.”

“In 1714, the General Baptist Church of Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring benefited from a considerable gift made by Joanna Neale of Frithsden, widow of Nehemiah. A farm known as The Hill in Chesham and another in Frithsden were both conveyed to the church, the income generated from their rental to remunerate at least two, but no more than three elders." [15]

John Wesley was a frequent traveller between London and Bristol, often spending the night en route in Oxford - a journey which took him through High Wycombe. His first recorded visit to Wycombe was on Friday 2nd March 1739; thereafter he preached frequently in the town, often in the open air or in a room in Easton Street.

Extracts from John Wesley’s diary [16]:

“25 September 1746: I came to Wycombe. It being the day on which the mayor was chosen, abundance of rabble, full of strong drink, came to the preaching on purpose to disturb, but they soon fell out among themselves, so that I finished my sermon in tolerable quiet.”

“27 October 1766: I rode to Wycombe. The room was much crowded, and yet could not contain the congregation. In the morning too they flocked together in such a manner as had not been seen here before.”
“15 October 1787: We went on to High Wycombe. The work of God is so considerably increased here that although three galleries are added to the preaching house it would scarce contain the people. Even at five in the morning it was thoroughly filled. Never before was there so fair a prospect of doing good at this place.”

Wesley's arrival in Wycombe coincided with a period of major industrial growth in the town: paper mills were being constructed around Wycombe Marsh and the chair-making industry was in its formative years. These industries attracted a new artisan class who would have been receptive to Wesley's philosophy and preaching.

The Methodist movement quickly expanded both within Wycombe and outwards to the surrounding commons which were experiencing housing pressures from the fast growing population of the town. Wesleyan churches were subsequently built to accommodate the growing congregations - the first one in Wycombe at St Mary Street, in 1779, and the first one on the surrounding commons at Penn in 1808.

“Within living memory Tyler's Green was an open common without any house or building upon it, but small encroachments were from time to time made upon the Waste at the skirt of the great Wood (St John's Wood which used to come down as far as Wheeler Avenue) on which mud houses were afterwards built which have gradually given place to buildings of a more substantial character, until within 40 or 50 years a population has grown up upon the Waste of several hundred souls with houses built closely together wherever a spot of ground could be safely enclosed ... a population now of nearly 600 is all comprised within the space of a quarter of a mile. It will be difficult to point to any other instance where a population has been collected so rapidly by illegal means and with so little resistance on the part of the owners of the soil' ...loud complaints from the neighbourhood & some warning notices... but empty threats...so in the estimation of the inhabitants the encroachments have acquired a security little short of the most legal tenure.”

“There has been rapid growth before but at an increasing pace in the last few years...in the last two years nearly 20 new cottages have been erected on the common...at the present moment there are preparations for encroachments not of feet or yards but of roods and poles...in one instance approximately an acre.”

“The only means of stopping it is by an Enclosure of the Common which is now being promoted in earnest by adjoining proprietors & it is understood that the Deans & Canons cordially support. It is clear that under no Enclosure can existing buildings be removed. The population is necessarily of a low & degraded class, for the most part extremely ignorant and needing most careful and judicious treatment.” [17]

“In 1805 - Just 14 years after John Wesley's death - the Wingrove family along with Richard Hunt, Richard Hainingham and John Brown purchased a piece of land in Penn from Baroness Howe. A church was built on the other side of the road to Penn Church and opened for worship in 1808. One of the first trustees in 1812 was John Birkenhead ‘a minister of the persuasion of Rev John Wesley’. ” [18]

The Wycombe Methodists were also notable for founding the first Sunday School in England. Hannah Ball was born in Stokenchurch in 1733 and moved to Wycombe in 1759 as housekeeper to her brother. She first met Wesley in January 1765 and quickly became a regular correspondent with him. By 1769 she had established a regular Sunday School where between 30 and 40 children met her “to read the scripture, learn the catechism and repeat the collect for the day.”
Extract from Hannah Ball’s diary [19]

“Nov 11th 1779. The Rev John Wesley opened our new chapel, by preaching on ‘We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling block, etc’. On this occasion we had a crowded and genteel audience. My heart’s desire and prayer to God is, that this neat and convenient house, erected to Jehovah’s glory, may be an everlasting blessing to the town of Wycombe.”

Although the major towns of the Chilterns were becoming established as industrial and commercial centres by the beginning of the 19th century, many of the commons were still regarded as wild and ‘depraved’ places. The pace of the industrial revolution, together with the enclosure of fields and common land, was radically changing traditional agriculture and depressing agricultural wages - creating widespread poverty within the communities. The remedy to poverty, as always, was to resort to drink - and drink sometimes led to rioting, the most notable events being the “swing riots” - probably named after a “Captain Swing” - of 1830 which broke out across southern England when labourers attacked farm machinery, factories and mills [Appendix 2].

The most notable riots in the Chilterns were attacks on paper mills in the Wye valley from High Wycombe down to Wooburn. At the subsequent trials at Aylesbury Assizes, 46 rioters were sentenced to death and 34 were given prison sentences; the death penalties were later commuted to imprisonment or transportation.

In January 1831, a Special Commission opened in Aylesbury to investigate the causes of the “swing riots”. Evidence presented to the Commission suggested a number of factors including the lack of religious leadership in the communities and excessive drinking.

“Dr John Lee of Hartwell House believed that the lack of a religious leadership at Stone (in the Vale of Aylesbury) coupled with other matters had been responsible: ‘Stone has been deprived of both Churchwardens ... no one equal to check those disposed to be disorderly and had the Curate resided ... the parish might have been kept in good order.”

“The Vicar of Hughenden, Frederick Vincent, thought the rioters had been influenced by ‘excitement of a regular battle and by liquor and previous success.” [20]

Many community leaders, and particularly churchmen and farmers, attempted a variety of measures to restore order, some more successful than others.

Some landowners invited local ministers to preach “hell and damnation” to their communities. An early example was the visit, in 1788, of the Reverend Thomas English - the Congregational minister from Cores End - to Flackwell Heath at the invitation of a local landowner, Mr Blackwell.
“At Mr Blackwell’s invitation the Revd Thomas English from Cores End came to address the people of Flackwell Heath on 6 July 1788 when the community was celebrating the climax of the cherry picking season. His tone was severe: “We meet you today on the spot of your annual pleasures to tell you that your conduct is sinful”. His dear friend, Mr Blackwell, could not bear to see the village “at this season devoted to vanity, riot, profaneness and Sabbath breaking”. Whether the sermon preached by the Revd English was heeded, or whether it fell on stony ground, is unknown.” [21]

The ‘hell and damnation’ theme was also popular with the Primitive Methodists [Appendix 2], and particularly their first minister in the Chilterns, the Rev James Pole, who preached regularly on Downley Common in 1835. [22]

“Tuesday 14 April: At Downly. At night the wheelwright’s shop was crammed, and many could not get in. Several wept, and some found peace with God.”

“Monday 20 April: It being Easter Monday we held a meeting on Downly common. The scene was both delightful and affecting, some praising God for deliverance and praying him to keep them in future - others crying for mercy.”

“Tuesday 28 April: At Downly in the open air. A large congregation, a mighty influence prevailed and a powerful conversion took place.”

While some denominations, and particularly the Primitive Methodists, were aiming to bring order to ‘depravity’ by preaching ‘hell and damnation’, others saw education and social activities as a means of bringing order to the commons’ settlements. Examples are the activities of the Anglican Canon Ridley at Hambleden, the Wesleyan Methodists at Flackwell Heath and the Evangelical minister Joseph Walker at Rotherfield Peppard.

“Canon W H Ridley was rector of Hambleden from 1840 to 1882. His methods of parochial work were to help his parishioners in all that would conduсе to their welfare whether in body or soul.”

“If he saw any of the circumstances of their lives to be conducive to evil he did his best to counteract or change them.”

“Thus he instituted Hambleden Fair as a means of withdrawing them from the unwholesome attractions of Henley Fair. With a like attention he started the Flower Show. The Reading Room in the Infant School on winter evenings was another means for enabling the young men to enjoy wholesome recreation. In order to encourage thrift he took pains to promote the South Bucks Friendly Society, then in its infancy.” [23]

“The origin of Flackwell Heath infant’s school was intimately connected with the arrival of Methodism in the village. A villager by the name of John Wright had a room built for Wesleyans to use on his land in 1832 and on weekdays the room doubled up as a school with fees of tuppence a week.”
“The school spent its formative years quietly instructing village children until it became the pre-eminent village school, opening for business in April 1876 under the new title of Flackwell Heath Infant School.” [24]

“In 1797 or 1798 Mr Joseph Walker, who is said to have been a schoolmaster, settled in the village. He found Peppard, he says, in a “wild, dark and benighted condition” and in 1798 he started a Sunday School, paying the poor neglected children who were running about the common on Sundays a halfpenny a week for attending.”

“Mr Walker soon found that his Sunday scholars were eagerly looking forward to a revel on Whit Monday “which brought together the very scum of the surrounding country to partake in, and be witnesses of cudgelling, foot and ass racing, and all the various abominations usual on these occasions; the day ending in intoxication, fighting and other evils too shameful to mention”. By the promise of a dinner he induced a large number of the young people to spend the day at the chapel.” [25]

In some settlements, the Anglican and Nonconformist churches worked together in attempting to tame the ‘depravity’ of the residents, but in others they were in conflict; the success rate also varied from one settlement to the next. An overview of the state of religious activity in Hertfordshire is provided by a survey conducted by the Reverend William Upton in 1847: [26]

“Lilley: A lovely village but in a religiously bad state. The church is a dilapidated miserable place. The Wesleyans are doing what good is done.”

“Little Gaddesden: There appear to be no dissenting efforts in this parish... Lady Bridgewater is supreme here.... There is a Wesleyan chapel at Hudnal with easy reach of the place. Some attend from here. It is opposed by Ashridge House.”

“Pirton: The Vicar is popular and useful. The cottage preaching has been less attended through his influence.”

“Kensworth: The people are excessively depraved and quite neglected. On Sunday evenings in fine weather this place is a scene of revelry.”

On Sunday March 30th 1851, the first and only national census of accommodation and attendance at places of worship was conducted. Special forms were distributed to the clergy or officials of all churches and chapels of all denominations for recording the number of “sittings” (seats) and attendance at all services on census day, together with the average attendance over the year.

Inevitably there were errors and inconsistencies in the returns - widespread ill health and adverse weather were sometimes blamed for low attendances - but the census does provide an extremely good overview of religious activity in the mid-19th century.

The census was conducted on a county by county basis, and it is necessary to examine the returns for four separate counties - Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire - to build up a comprehensive picture of religious activity in the Chilterns. [27 - 30]
One interesting outcome is the variation in strength (and thus influence) of different denominations across the Chilterns. Figure 1 shows a breakdown by denomination of attendances at High Wycombe, Chesham and Henley-on-Thames on census day. It can be seen that the Methodists had made major inroads in High Wycombe, the Baptists dominated in Chesham and the Anglicans dominated in Henley. The Quakers had shrunk to congregations of 10 or less, and the Roman Catholics were limited to strongholds such as Stonor Park.

These patterns were reflected in the rural areas around the major towns. See Figures 2, 3, and 4.

The snapshot provided by the 1851 census reflects the history of nonconformity in the Chilterns over the preceding 200 years: the Baptists had maintained a strong presence around Chesham, Berkhamsted and Tring ever since the General Baptist Church was established there in the mid-1600s, Wesley's Methodist influence was spreading out from High Wycombe. The Independents and Congregationalists offered alternative nonconformist worship in Oxfordshire. The Quakers had been reduced to a small minority.

The snapshot also reflects nonconformity in the Chilterns today - many of the active chapels around Chesham are Baptist, whereas those around High Wycombe and around Dunstable tend to be Methodist.
Figure 2: Methodist chapels recorded in the 1851 census

Figure 3: Baptist chapels recorded in the 1851 census

Figure 4: Independent and congregational chapels recorded in the 1851 census
1851 was not only the year of the ecclesiastical census but it was also the year of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, when Victorian power and confidence were arguably at their peak. At the same time, the nonconformists were becoming increasingly confident, challenging the centuries-old dominance of the Anglican Church.

“Nonconformity became much more political in the 1880s; before 1870 the mixture of religion with politics had meant the evil of an established church. By the later 19th century the nonconformists had gained sufficiently in confidence and numbers to think of themselves as an alternative establishment, with the political power to shape national policies.”

“The initial response of the institutional churches to intensifying denominational rivalries, the decline in external recruitment and the ‘problem’ of the unchurched masses was to broaden the front of their appeal by diversifying their product in an expanding consumer market. In other words, they expanded the provision of leisure time activities with more services, more weekday meetings, more clubs, societies and activities.” [31]

It was also a time when many Chiltern commons were being enclosed, creating major shifts in the pattern of the landscape and land ownership and accelerating the migration of displaced small farmers from rural to urban areas. However, a beneficial outcome of the enclosure for some Chiltern settlements was the allocation of pieces of land for new chapels and schools.

“We now turn to the complex issue of changes in the pattern of land ownership following an enclosure. After an enclosure, inevitably there were winners and losers. The former group included the principal landowning families and the church but the identity of the losers is more difficult to analyse. The central question is: following an enclosure did land tend to pass out of the hands of the small proprietors and become absorbed into the large estates? If this was the case, this represented a considerable socio-economic shift as the displaced small farmers would have been forced to give up their self-employed status and join the waged labour force working on the larger farms or, worse still, in the mines or burgeoning industrial centres.”

“Interest in the fortunes of small operators has continued in a number of studies produced in the 1970s and 1980s. Working in Buckinghamshire, M E Turner claimed that the turnover of small landowners every two or three years was as much as 50-60 per cent. Of the new owners, it seems that many were cottager class and so, although much of what Marx and the Hammonds had claimed now appeared to be true in that cottagers were giving up their land, equally it seemed that many others from the lower classes benefited from the new arrangements in the same way that the landowning aristocracy did.” [32]

Different settlements across the Chilterns, were affected by these changes in different ways - the outcome often being dependent on factors such as the personality of the religious incumbents, the occupations of the inhabitants and the Lord of the Manor’s attitude. An example is the different way in which two commons’ settlements originally within the same parish evolved, for example Naphill and Prestwood, on opposite sides of the Hughenden Valley.

Enclosure of that part of Naphill common, lying in Hughenden Parish, started soon after Benjamin Disraeli bought the Hughenden Estate in 1847. The process took nine years before the Act of Parliament authorising the enclosure was passed in 1856.
While the enclosure process was progressing, a Primitive Methodist chapel had been built in the settlement, as a result of preaching on the common over the previous 20 years by the Primitive Methodist ministers James Pole and John Guy.

“We can speculate why Naphill was such fertile ground for dissenters:
- The Chilterns have had a reputation for dissent from authority and orthodoxy, beginning with the Lollards.
- Hughenden was a sparsely populated parish of generally poor people farming poor soil. They may not have been entirely happy with the Church of England - sometimes known as the Tory Party at prayer - and having Disraeli, a Tory Prime Minister, as Lord of the Manor.
- It was a long walk to the church on a rough track.
- Charismatic Methodist preachers visited: James Pole in 1835 and John Guy for several years around that time.
- There were some local activists.
- The nonconformist churches appear to have given a role and voice to groups excluded by the Church of England. Women made important contributions and even working men could become lay preachers.” [33]

Extracts from James Pole's and John Guy's journals. [34]

"James Pole, April 19 1835: In the afternoon at Napple common. Hundreds came to hear and a mighty Unction attended the word."

"John Guy, May 23 1841: At Naphill. The ungodly disturbed the class, but the Lord was with the people and three joined. There has been a great improvement in the morals of the people in the neighbourhood. Other societies have shared the fruits of our labours. But we have raised a new society of 20 at Naphill."

Prestwood common lay on the opposite side of the Hughenden Valley. A Baptist community had worshipped for many years and had built a chapel there in 1823. Later, in 1849, a new Anglican church was built at a cost of £1350, funded by the new minister Thomas Evetts and, in 1863, a small Wesleyan Methodist chapel was built. A few years later, in 1871, a Primitive Methodist chapel was opened nearby at Bryants Bottom.

The new Anglican church started to have a major impact on everyday life in this small community.
“Although it may be that church membership was showing signs of decline by 1890, the role religion played in Prestwood was profound. The new Ecclesiastical Parish with its centrepiece, a fine new parish church, established Prestwood as a village in its own right. The adjoining National School, the only day school in the village, provided the opportunity of education for the children of the community, though it was a difficult task for the church to keep the school full. But by 1890 they were winning this battle. The Anglican Church also provided cultural and sporting events and they were popular.”

“New Dissent in the village responded to this and provided cultural activities of their own, not always exclusive to their own members. The Strict Baptists had a long established base of members expanded by groups of extended families from the farming community. The Methodists, smaller in comparison, drew its membership mostly from the artisan class. Though the Church of England was left to serve the village poor, it still held the loyalty of a cross-section of individuals across the socio-economic groups. And it maintained a dominant and steadfast position throughout the period. As in all localities some individuals did wish to exist in a community within a community, but all denominations contributed in their way to give this once group of scattered settlements a strong sense of identity.” [35]

The nonconformists were not only challenging the Anglican Church at this time; there were also conflicts between different nonconformist sects.

“John Wesley visited Chesham in 1769 and 1775, noting that “all that heard seemed affected for the present”. More than a century passed and in 1895 Rev Richard Harper, Superintendent of the High Wycombe Methodist Circuit wrote that “he had discovered a township of 8,000 people only 25 miles from London with no provision for Methodism”. In 1897, a schoolroom was built in Broad Street, but there were too many churches in Chesham already, including four Baptist churches. The “Chesham problem” became a regular feature of the Synod agenda and most agreed “there is no room for Methodism in Chesham”. It was not until 1932, when Chesham’s population had grown significantly, that a Methodist church became fully established.” [36]

While the Anglicans, nonconformists and other religious groups were consolidating their roles in local communities during the second half of the 19th century, the Government was passing Acts which effectively transferred powers from religious groups to State institutions. Two of the most important Acts were the Elementary Education Act of 1870 which introduced compulsory education for all children aged between 5 and 13, and the Local Government Act of 1894 which introduced elected councils at parish level [Appendix 2].

The changes introduced by these Acts often added to the existing tensions between the established Anglican Church and the nonconformist dissenters.

“During the process of the enclosure of Stokenchurch in 1858, land was allotted to be held in trust for a site for a school and cemetery. The process was to be administered by the Incumbent, ie the Vicar and the Churchwardens, known as the Vestry. At this time there were no parish Councils and village affairs were overseen by the Vestry. However, the school was not built for another sixteen years. The Vicar and Churchwardens appear to have been reluctant to proceed with this as the School Board which was finally formed consisted of two Methodists, a Congregationalist and a churchman, under the chairmanship of Squire Brown.”

“A recording made by a local resident George Britnall, who died in 1984 aged 106, remembers his father telling him that, after a lot of argument with the Vicar, terms
were drawn up, backed by a legal document whereby the Board could take possession of the land."

"A piece of land was to be set aside for burial ground, again administered by the Vicar and Churchwardens. There seems to have been many disputes between the Church and the Dissenters over this issue with locked gates and skirmishes with the police. George Britnall related how a group of men cut the padlock to the cemetery site. After the cemetery was in use, half an acre was set aside for nonconformist burials."

"Parish Councils were set up in 1894 to replace the old system of the Vestry."

"A comparison of the Vestry and Parish Council members indicates that there was a marked swing away from the large farmers and the establishment towards chair-makers and less wealthy tradesmen. Meetings were held in the evening whereas the Vestry had held them during the day, thus reducing the possibility of working men to attend. Only one previous member of the Vestry was elected, Mr Painter, the miller."

Over the last 500 years, the nonconformist movement has survived because it has continually adapted to changing circumstances and needs.

"Generally speaking, the protestant churches began to experience absolute decline shortly before the First World War. A possible effect of the war was to reverse this decline in the 1920s and to bring the churches to their highest-ever level of membership. Then began an accelerating decline to 1947, followed by a recovery to the mid-1950s and then a prolonged period of further decline in the 1960s which began to level off in the later 1970s."

"Institutional decline of historic churches, though, should not be taken to imply wholesale religious decline. The total number of attenders at places of Christian worship in England was still 3.8 million in 2001. Moreover other varieties of religious experience - not all of them Christian - were springing up."

The pattern described by Edward Royle, in the above extract from his book “Modern Britain”, can be seen in the story of Christian worship in many communities in the Chilterns, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War. One example is the relative fortunes of Beacons Bottom Primitive Methodist chapel and the Jubilee Road chapel, both near Stokenchurch.
“Beacons Bottom was a flourishing church in the 1930s, famous for its pantomimes. The church did a great work among young people but many of the village’s young men were killed at Calais in the Second World War and the church never seemed to recover. In its last days there were sometimes only three people in the congregation and two of them would be sharing the platform with the preacher, one playing the organ and the other pumping it! It closed in 1970, was sold in 1972 for £3750, then converted into a house and resold in 1975 for £27,950.” [39]

During the Second World War, Frank Stables had a vision of a hut on wheels and a heartfelt ambition to go and preach the Gospel of Jesus to all who would listen.

“In June 1950 he went to the Jubilee Road, stood on the common and held his first open air Sunday School. In September of that year his uncle Henry Bird gave him a hut which was standing in his back garden. This allowed him to hold his Sunday School in the dry.”

“The Sunday School, held twice each Sunday, grew. By 1978, when God took Frank Stables to be with him, an extension had been built and an evening service had also been in action. As the village grew, children were fetched from all over the area to hear about Jesus and to sing God’s praises.” [40]

One solution to the problem of declining congregations was to merge two churches or chapels together; an alternative solution to cutting costs was to hold two separate services in the same building at different times. An example of this was the merger, in 1932, of the Wesleyan Methodist and Primitive Methodist churches at Winchmore Hill.

“The Wesleyan church in Winchmore Hill (near Amersham) was opened in 1861, the same year in which the Primitive Methodists also built a church in the village.”

“In 1932, following the merging of the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists, services were held on alternate Sundays in the two churches, but this was not a success, so the united congregation decided to meet at the former Primitive Methodist Church.”

“The Wesleyan Church was sold to the Church of England in 1937 and became the St Andrew’s mission church. However, the church was never well supported and in 1999 it was sold and rebuilt as a private house.” [41]

The Methodist church in Winchmore Hill is still active today.

An altogether more unusual example was the merging of the Primitive Methodist chapel at Slip End with the Baptist church at Pepperstock.

“The Primitive Methodist chapel in Slip End (near Luton) was built in 1868, and on the opening day of August 17th a tea was held at Pepperstock Baptist Church.”
“Membership reached its peak in 1886 with 66 members. Nearly 200 people would attend Sunday services out of a village population of about 600. From the late 1880s things were never quite so good again. Trade in Luton was very bad. With the severe depression there were over 400 houses empty in the borough, and for the first time there was a decrease in membership.”

“By 1930 membership had dwindled to 10, though attendances at church were always larger than the membership alone. The building needed constant repairs adding to the economic burden on the membership. This prompted talk of closure until the 1950s when youth work temporarily revived fortunes.”

“In the early 1970s the church obviously still had very good relations with the Pepperstock Baptists, who had been meeting in the settlement since 1817. It was proposed to sell the Slip End Methodist chapel and enter into an agreement to share Pepperstock Baptist chapel. The decision was duly taken by the Methodists to sell and the chapel was sold in 1973, Slip End/Pepperstock becoming only the third instance of Baptists and Methodists sharing a building in England.” [42]

Slip End chapel is now a bridal shop, and Pepperstock chapel is now a residential dwelling.

Many of the churches and chapels built during the 19th century are no longer active places of worship today; many of them are private dwelling houses, some are commercial premises and others have fallen into disrepair and no longer exist. However, a significant number continue to be active and play an important part in community life today. This is particularly the case in settlements where the majority of their local common has been enclosed and subsequently built over, leading to significant population increases. One such settlement is Holmer Green between Amersham and High Wycombe.

“In medieval times Holmer Heath extended over 600 acres of woodland and seven different parishes had common rights.”

“All was to change when the heath was enclosed in 1855, creating patches of geometric field boundaries in the midst of the older enclosures. The enclosure of the heath, combined with the soil quality and the proximity of the new railway lines, created ideal conditions for commercial cherry orchards, but the industry was short lived as competition from cheaper sources started to bite. The redundant cherry orchards then provided an ideal opportunity for widespread house building, creating the village of Holmer Green, whose population today in in excess of 4,000.” [43]
The story of Holmer Green provides a good summary of the evolution of religion on the Chiltern commons over more than five centuries. In 1850, Holmer Green was incorporated into the newly formed Ecclesiastical Parish of Penn Street and an Anglican church, Christ Church, was built in 1894.

However, Baptists are recorded as worshipping on Holmer Heath as far back as 1798 and it is very likely that their predecessors, the Lollards, were active on the Heath before that. Wesleyan Methodists started to meet in 1822. Both communities subsequently built chapels - the Wesleyan Methodists in 1841 and the Baptists in 1869. In recent years, the congregations of both churches have outgrown the original buildings. A new Baptist church was built in 1999 and the Methodist church was refurbished in 2010.

So what of the future? While it is, perhaps, unclear where the traditionally accepted forms of the nonconformist movement will go in the 21st century, or what pressures it will face, there is little doubt that the movement will still play an important role in everyday life.

To paraphrase what Edward Royle wrote in Modern Britain “the response of the institutional (including the ‘established’ nonconformist) churches to increasing secularism was to broaden their appeal by diversifying their product in an expanding consumer market.” In other words, they expanded the provision of leisure time activities with more services, more weekday meetings, more clubs and more church centred activities (not dissimilar to the Holmer Green approach).

How the ‘established’ nonconformist faiths will further evolve to face the changing demands of society … only time will tell.
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Puritans and Persecution

Some of the more notable Acts of Parliament passed between 1550 and 1700 are:

The Act of Uniformity of 1558 (Elizabeth I) set the order of prayer to be used in churches and required everyone to attend church once a week, or to be fined 12 pence.

The 1558 Act was repealed in 1650 under the Rump Parliament of the Commonwealth under an “Act for the Repeal of several Clauses in Statutes imposing Penalties for not coming to Church”.

The 1558 Act was then reinstated in 1660 on the restoration of Charles II as monarch.

A new Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662 (Charles II) which prescribed the new (1662) Book of Common Prayer for all rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, and which also required all ministers to take an oath of allegiance. Some 2,000 clergymen refused to take the oath and were expelled from the Church.

The Five Mile Act of 1665 (Charles II) forbade clergymen from living within five miles of a parish from which they had been expelled, unless they swore an oath never to resist the king or attempt to alter the government of Church or State.

The Toleration Act of 1688 (William and Mary) allowed freedom of worship to Nonconformists who had pledged to the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy. They were allowed their own places of worship and their own teachers.

Quakers and Baptists

General Baptists are regarded as the successors of the Lollards, and held the belief that the way of salvation is not confined to particular persons, but is open to all. Their system of church order and discipline was much more structured than that of the Particular Baptists. The General Baptist Church of Berkhamsted was founded around 1640 and in Buckinghamshire one of the earliest churches was founded at Cuddington in 1669.

Particular Baptists, on the other hand, were so-called because they held to a view of the atonement that Christ in His death accomplished redemption for particular individuals, usually referred to as the elect; present day Strict Baptists are descendants of the Particular Baptists. In Amersham, the Particular Baptists seceded from the General Baptists in 1740, claiming that they were the original church whose rights had been usurped by the opposite faction. While the General Baptists continued to worship in the original meeting house (built in 1677) the Particular Baptists worshipped in a cottage at nearby Woodrow from 1740 until a new meeting house was constructed in the town in about 1780.

Quakers have held meetings in the Chilterns since at least 1650 and the Upperside meeting, which became based at Thomas Ellwood's house in Coleshill, dates back to about 1668. The earliest meeting house in the Chilterns, at Jordans, was built in 1688.

Congregational churches practiced the principle of each congregation independently and autonomously running its own affairs. In 1768 Thomas Grove was expelled from Oxford for engaging in methodistical practices and established a congregational church at Cores End, near Wooburn, which had been a centre of nonconformist activity since the mid-17th century.
The arrival of Wesley

Wesleyan Methodists followed the teaching of John Wesley which emphasized the capacity of each person to choose to respond to God freely and the opportunity for all to be saved. The Church was organised on a “connexional system”, employing a combination of itinerant and local preachers and an array of local, circuit, district, and connexional officials and committees.

Primitive Methodists were more decentralised and democratic. The circuits were virtually autonomous and their administration was not dominated by church officials, but by the laity. Primitive Methodist preachers and communities differed from their Wesleyan counterparts - although the Wesleyans tended towards respectability, Primitives tended to be poorer and more revivalist. Wesleyan congregations were more likely to be from a lower middle class, or artisan, background whereas Primitive Methodists were likely to be small farmers, servants, mill workers, and agricultural labourers.

The Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists merged together in 1932.

Depravity and Riot

Swing riots were a widespread uprising by agricultural workers in 1830 which spread throughout southern England. The name, derived from the fictitious Captain Swing, was often appended to the threatening letters sent to farmers, magistrates, and parsons.

The riots were a protest against the replacement of manual labour by machinery and the consequential unemployment and lowering of wages. In the Chilterns, the paper mills of the Wye valley from High Wycombe down to Wooburn were a particular target and several of the rioters were sentenced to death at Aylesbury assizes, but the sentences were later commuted to imprisonment or transportation.

Power to the People

Some of the more notable Acts of Parliament passed in the late 19th century were:

The 1870 Education Act which allowed voluntary schools to carry on unchanged, but established a system of ‘school boards’ to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed. The boards were locally elected bodies which drew their funding from the local rates. Unlike the voluntary schools, religious teaching in the board schools was to be ‘non-denominational’.

The Local Government Act 1888 established county councils and county borough councils in England and Wales, including Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire.

The Local Government Act 1894 reformed local government in England and Wales outside the County of London and introduced elected councils at district and parish level. The new parish councils were given a number of powers and duties, including appointment of overseers of the poor, holding or maintaining parish property (including village greens, allotments, recreation grounds) for the benefit of the inhabitants, and acquisition of buildings for parish purposes.
Meat to Market

Droving through the Chilterns  Phillip Clapham

In his book, *The Making of the British Landscape* [1], the *Time Team* archaeologist and prolific author, Francis Pryor said the road system of our country had largely come about as a result of farmers shifting livestock around - or taking them to markets. Even roads that only came into existence following the Enclosure Acts were designed for the movement of livestock and other agricultural requirements. Turnpike trusts were set up in the 18th century with the purpose of improving the road system for the coaching trade and the private carriages of the wealthy, as well as the increasing movement of goods by horse-drawn carts. However, it was stipulated by Parliament that turnpikes must cater for the movement of animals to and from markets - and tolls should not be prohibitive [2]. Most toll roads were constructed with wide verges so that cattle and sheep might forage as they went along.

Passing through the toll gates was a laborious process for drovers and other travellers alike as the livestock, often a hundred to two hundred in a herd, were counted by the toll keeper, which meant funnelling the animals through a narrow space. Livestock also tended to wander across the whole road space, even with dogs yapping at their heels, and presented a hazard to wheeled traffic. It was also easy to panic cattle and sheep and, while the drovers could control most situations, it must often have been a headache.

Green roads were different. They were quiet and the animals could browse in peace, without constant gathering up. Cameron [3] claimed the Welsh and Scots drovers avoided the turnpikes where possible and slowly worked their way via the commons and green roads - which would have included the Icknield Way. Others are not so sure. An examination of account books of drovers that have survived in Wales shows that half of them did use turnpikes, and paid tolls [4] - but took advantage of alternative routes where possible.

Defoe [5], who lived through the late 17th and early 18th century, was in favour of turnpikes. In his appendix to the second volume of *A Journey Through the Whole Land of Great Britain* (1724-1727), he describes in graphic detail what was wrong with the road system, and not least the vast tract of clay lands that run across the Midlands (including the Vale of Aylesbury) that was heavy, sticky, and troublesome to all travellers, not just wheeled vehicles. He added that turnpikes reduced the amount of toil involved in cattle working their way through heavy clay soil so they were able to progress further in the course of a day than previously and were able to come to market fatter.

The movement of cattle and sheep to English markets in the Midlands and the London area was historically a massive enterprise - but the routes they took across the Chilterns involves mostly guess work. Routes weren't written down, oral history is largely lost, and the Welsh had their own language and kept to themselves, mostly avoiding contact with townsfolk. They passed through the Chilterns a couple of times in the spring, and again in the autumn, making for the seasonal fairs such as Barnet and St Faith's at Norwich, and major livestock markets such as Kingston, Billericay, and Smithfield. They would have had favourite stopping places and lodgings, and their accounts show they drank a lot of beer. This was not the strong real ale we have on sale nowadays but beer that was quite weak and was preferred to drinking water. Droving was a dirty and dusty trade - and copious amounts of liquid were required at the end of a day's drive.

The animals were purchased at the fairs by dealers and butchers. At Kingston there were many fields used to grow barley for the numerous malt houses in the town. The maltsters purchased Welsh blacks, fattened them up on the barley stubble and, making a nice profit, sold them on to local butchers who shipped the salted beef down river to London [6].
The Vale of Aylesbury has been cattle country for hundreds of years - and became a fattening area for cattle to put on bulk after which they could be sold on at a higher price. It is amazing how much weight a bullock can put on just by eating grass - and grass grows thick and lush in the Vale. Defoe said of the Vale, ‘it is eminent [well known] for the richest of land, and the richest graziers in England’. In the 16th century the Tudor kings and queens held fields at Creslow, near Whitchurch, one of which was reputed to be the biggest field in the land. In 1486, custody of Creslow manor was granted to Sir William Stonor (1449-1494) for a twelve year period, making him the first ‘Keeper of Croslowe’. Creslow Manor was then sometimes referred to as Creslow Pastures as it was here that the livestock used by the Royal household were pastured up until the English Civil War and the establishment of the Commonwealth. It should be noted that the Tudors had originated in North Wales and, during their rule, the droving trade became an important part of the crown economy.

From the 12th to the end of the 16th century, only royalty and the nobility had the means to purchase large numbers of cattle and sheep at once. The trade also supplied the army which was involved in wars, both here and on the continent. Northampton developed as a supply base for the army and, after about 1580, the trade became important as a supplier of meat to the navy. This is an arbitrary date that reflects the importance of the navy in the Tudor period but it was essentially Nelson, in the late 18th century, who brought in regulations to make sure his seamen were well fed and fit to fight - and this involved very large amounts of salted meat. It was supplied on the hoof and there are some well known green roads between South Wales and the West Country and navy ports such as Plymouth, Portsmouth and Chatham [7]. These didn't impinge on the Chilterns, but in the 17th and 18th centuries the sharp growth in the population of towns and cities across the Midlands and the expansion of London led to an increased droving market that reached its zenith in the 19th century.

The Scots route was clearly via Harpenden common on the Great North Road that led directly to Barnet and Smithfield. The annual fair at Harpenden still involves Scottish dancing and games (with the odd kilt coming out of the bottom of the wardrobe). For the Welsh to reach Smithfield market, the biggest meat wholesale market in Europe according to Defoe, drove routes must have crossed the Chilterns. The Welsh also had a series of well-defined routes into London, and most notably the route from North Wales via the old Welsh Lane that ends up in Buckingham. Which way did they go from here? This is what I shall explore.

Routes from South Wales and the West Country may have stayed south of the Thames, whilst the Ridgeway route from near Avebury to Goring is more promising, crossing the Thames there or at Whitchurch (not by the packhorse bridge, but by fording the river). Once on the extensive Goring Heath with its many tracks and bridleways, the Icknield Way could take them around the foot of the Chilterns to Essex (not on the escarpment itself but along the spring line), or they crossed the Chilterns towards London.

The route from mid-Wales via Shrewsbury and Worcester is interesting as it appears to have avoided Oxford, with its colleges, rivers and marshland, and general busy commercial centre, by skirting the town on high ground via Islip and Wheatley. This route is described by Ogilby on his pre-turnpike series of road maps and in the Britannia Atlas 1675 [8].

The problem we are interested in solving is what routes drovers took once they reached the Chilterns. After 1850 the mania for building railways led to the rundown and disappearance of long distance droving. Livestock were loaded on to rail trucks, very often with a drover to accompany them as they had to be sold on at the other end, and this involved a short journey to market in most cases. This critically reduced the journey time, avoided the
payment of tolls and the increasing traffic encountered on roads. What the railways
couldn’t do was buy and sell animals along the way. Some markets and fairs fell into decline
- and others diversified. Hence, as far as the commons are concerned we have a narrow
window of time to investigate, from around 1600 to 1850. It is all a matter of guesswork,
but we do have some clues.

Clue 1: Water
Drovers’ animals required a good supply of water along the way, and at stopover points.
Cattle drink more than 20 litres per day (4 to 5 gallons) - which is a lot of water! In the
Chilterns, the chalk streams such as the Wye, the Misbourne, the Chess, the Gade, and the
Ver would have been an important resource of running water to be exploited as the chalk
geology creates a dry countryside. Water seeps down through the chalk and emerges where
it meets the underlying clay, mainly at the foot of the escarpment. There is less water now
due to water extraction.

The spring line was favoured by farms and hamlets, and villages are found straddled along it
- together with the Icknield Way. This provides us with a perfect clue for a drove route as
springs and small watercourses abound at Wendover, at the bottom of the escarpment, but
beyond the town it is dry. Wendover Dean [9] had to be crossed before the next source of
water at Mobwell. This is the source of the Misbourne, a large spring-fed pond on the
outskirts of Great Missenden, situated opposite the Black Horse pub, which could well have
been used by drovers. The fields behind the pub are full of springs and small streams that
eventually join into the Misbourne and this area, for obvious reasons, has never been built
on. The springs continue to seep out of the ground for half a mile or so. The Misbourne
widens out through the town, with the church on high ground but
overlooking the river, and proceeds
through the grounds of what was once
Missenden Abbey. Conveniently for
the drovers, Henry VIII had dissolved
the abbey in the 16th century. At this
point drovers could have gone two
ways.

The most obvious route was to follow
the Misbourne through the Chalfonts
to Uxbridge, crossing the Colne into
Middlesex where the clay geology
favoured streams and ponds. They
could also have forked off at
Missenden and gone by way of Hyde
Heath to Chesham Bois common and the valley of the river Chess (see Map 1), keeping just
above the flood plain all the way to Rickmansworth and the river Colne, and then going via
Harrow straight to Marble Arch and the road to Smithfield (or the Caledonian or Metropolitan
markets), or going via Bushey Heath to Barnet Fair [10]. The relevance of Hyde Heath will
be revealed a bit later.

However, in spite of the obvious route, we also know that ponds were built by farmers for
their livestock at summer pasture on the uplands. Commons are what we are interested in
as far as this project is concerned, and commons had ponds. On the top of the Chiltern
plateau, the geology is clay with flints covering the chalk bedrock, and clay is easily puddled
to form a durable layer to hold water.
Much water from the streams is extracted by modern water companies and these streams are shadows of their former selves. For example, a seasonal stream runs along the foot of the Radnage valley to West Wycombe but, due to water extraction in Radnage, it rarely flows except in times of exceptional rainfall, and not always then. At West Wycombe, this stream becomes the River Wye which flows through the Dashwood estate and High Wycombe to the Thames at Bourne End. Slough Lane and Slough Farm imply a wet and marshy area on the west side of West Wycombe Hill (see Map 2), and in the caves (created as a result of chalk extraction) there is a river deep under the hill itself. This implies an impervious layer of chalk and marl causing the water to move sideways instead of downwards, as it does in the porous chalk formation. It may also explain why the original early medieval village of West Wycombe was situated on the hill top, where the church still sits, and only migrated down the hill when the water table was lower [11].

Drovers coming from Stokenchurch were able to take advantage of the pond at Water End (Beacons Bottom on the edge of the former common) and then hit a dry run until the springs and river that rises in the field known as Long Meadow (behind the old walled garden) which backs up as far as Chorley Farm (a very long meadow in fact) where there is a small stone bridge over the stream at this point. Further downstream from the village there was a succession of mills on the river, all the way down to Loudwater on the other side of High Wycombe. Drovers wishing to avoid the town, the mills, and the wheeled traffic on the main road and, not least, the livestock market (and its attendant fees accrued for using the town streets), could have gone up the track to Downley common, from roughly where the Pedestal monument is situated [12]. Downley common provided pasture and the Le Spencer pub, as well as ponds. Although High Wycombe library has some papers claiming the Welsh commonly visited Downley, actual positive proof is lacking. Therefore, we have to think where they might have gone after Downley - which is not obvious [13]. Another modern road which can be seen on all the early OS maps is that
running from Stokenchurch to Lane End. Drovers, we might assume, would have avoided Marlow and instead gone along Park Lane to Booker common, Handy Cross, Flackwell Heath, Fulmer common and, making use of the Alderbourne, on to Iver Heath, crossing the Colne at Cowley (see Map 3).

Although it might seem improbable, drovers seeking out Downley common as a favoured stopping point, and friendly natives so to speak, may have made their way down Plomer Hill and joined up with this southern route on Booker common (which at one time almost reached as far north as the A40) [14]. Alternatively, if they were intending to sell some of their animals at the market in Wycombe they could have descended the hill to the Houghenden stream and gone that way into Frogmore. A diversion to Downley common with its ponds and grazing seems to imply a location they were prepared to go out of their way to reach and the vast expanse of Wycombe Heath lay open to them to the north east.

Continuing from Downley common on to Naphill common they could have descended into what is now Houghenden Valley village (avoiding Houghenden Manor) where the Houghenden brook rises behind the houses (in the fields running from the Harrow pub). More importantly is the spring-fed pond on what is now Boss Lane (formerly the track leading up to Kingshill and Great Missenden).

We may note a similar situation prevails in the valley of the river Gade, with numerous springs and streams and a variety of routes. The old town of Hemel Hempstead is built on a ridge above the flood plain [15]. Hemel, incidentally, had an important sheep market and sheep were of course extensively reared in the Chilterns. The Woolpack pub name is a reference to the packhorse trade that carried the wool to the mills - and has nothing to do with sheep markets. The big question we might ask - why would drovers have used commons? The obvious answer is to avoid paying tolls - but they would still have required a stopover, a pub with victuals and liquid refreshment, a bed for the night - and, most importantly, permission from the commoners or landowner to graze their animals overnight.

Map 4
Robert Morden’s Map 1701

Clue 2: Foraging
Drove herds grazed as they travelled - which is why a green road was preferred if there was the option. The Icknield Way is a good local example, and there are historical records of livestock movement along this route. It doesn’t actually cross the Chilterns but goes round the edge of the escarpment, which means that drovers coming from the west could join it at various points and make their way to important markets and fairs at Leighton Buzzard, Harlow Bush, and various places in Essex (such as Billericay, Chelmsford, and Brentwood) and East Anglia itself.

On the other hand, deep-sided country lanes were not livestock-friendly on a long journey and were only for moving animals from summer to winter pasture, for example, or from one field to another, not the sort of route favoured by the Welsh. The banks and high hedges left drovers vulnerable and unable to fully control their
herd, especially if spooked by an obstacle of some kind. Enclosed spaces would have enabled criminals to target the head drover - and his money belt. No, the drovers would have opted for wide open spaces and the kind of thing we encounter along the pre-turnpike road between Buckingham and Aylesbury. Surviving examples of green roads in the Chilterns are rare - apart from the Icknield Way. Commons had tracks and cattle were able to spread out. There is a lovely example of a green road - beyond the Chilterns (but importantly on the pre-turnpike route between Buckingham and Aylesbury). It is between East Claydon and Botolph Claydon (see John Sellars’ map of 1693 and Robert Morden’s map of 1701 - Map 4). The modern lane has a three hedge system, a road for traffic which is divided by a middle hedge from a green road, running side-by-side for a couple of miles.

The Icknield Way is wide and green and the obvious example as G R Crosher, in Along Chiltern Ways (1973) mentions that the Catherine Wheel pub in Crowell had a lean-to in the 1960s, said to have been used by drovers stopping for the night. It may even have been used by packhorse teams travelling along Colliers Row/Lane (see Map 5).

What the Chilterns do provide are odd bits of green land which can be picked out on old OS maps, or Bryant’s Map of Buckinghamshire, roads that MAY appear to fit the description of possessing what is known as manorial waste - patches of common land that would have been used as wayside grazing spots. One such route is Park Lane - situated at the top end of West Wycombe parish (see Map 6). Lane End, a stone’s throw away, was in turn at the head of the long narrow parish of Hambleden. Park Lane runs as a wide and swollen green lane as far as Booker common on the old maps and has a clear association with the movement of livestock (local or otherwise).

Chorley Green appears to be another section of manorial waste, on the narrow valley bottom road between Radnage and Chorley Farm (just outside West Wycombe)[16]. A pre-turnpike route probably ran along this lane to Bennett’s End where it joins Collier’s Lane (part lane, part bridleway) to Crowell Hill and the Vale via Sprigg’s Alley.
A more obvious piece of manorial waste can be seen between Wycombe and Hazlemere (on various OS maps, Bryant’s map, and maps seen by the author in the offices of Hazlemere parish council which are on a much larger scale). It runs along the parish boundary of Wycombe and Hughenden, up to the upland zone of what was Wycombe Heath (basically an area bounded on one side by Kingshill and Spurlands End, with Tylers Green on the opposite side). At the Hazlemere end it is still known as Green Street (see Map 7), and as it goes down the hill into the valley at Hughenden, it is still known as Green Hill, with Green Farm to one side. The old road can still be seen, now mostly a strip of woodland. The road was still in use up to the 1960s (when a housing estate was built to one side). This was primarily a green road used by locals to take livestock to summer pasture - but it could have been used by drovers coming from the Downley common direction [17]. It can also be seen as manorial waste or common land as there are the remains of two quarries at the top of Green Hill, and the section between Green Hill and Hazlemere had an extensive brick field that developed into a brick works, now covered in housing.

We can see that waste is often located on parish and county boundaries - but why? It may have had something to do with the idea of a sort of no man’s land where parochial responsibilities were suspended. In other words, these areas were sometimes regarded as ‘beyond the pale’, an area at the edge of the parish where the poor, the disabled, and those with learning difficulties were shunted, neither in one parish or the other. This allowed the parish church and local worthies some breathing space - they didn’t have to provide them with sustenance or alms. The important point is that such areas could have been free of common rights, and tracks and lanes through them would not entail paying levies to landowners or treading on the toes of commoners jealously guarding their rights of grazing, a sort of perfect seasonal drove way. This idea may account for road names such as Beggers Lane and Bulbeggers Lane (between Tring and Hemel) - but only if they define early parish boundaries. Bulbeggers Lane is an interesting one as it comes down from Berkhamsted Common via Little Heath (with an isolated pub) to Bourne End (on the Bulbourne) and Boxmoor (riverside pasture that was common land). Beggars Lane is between Cow Roast and Tring station - but the area here has been subject to enclosure changes.

Downley common (on the border between the old parish of West Wycombe and that of Hughenden) may even fit that bill to some extent as there are extensive clay workings there and evidence of kilns (see www.chilternarchaeology.com/downley.htm) and even a former pub, the Brickmakers Arms (situated on the common side).

Clue 3 : High ground
We have established that drovers liked to keep to high ground with an open aspect. In general, this kept them away from arable fields, villages and towns, and wheeled road traffic. It was a considered measure as it also kept them away from robbers. Knaves Beech, near Loudwater, is so named as it was the haunt of highwaymen, at the top of the long hill up from Holtspur and Beaconsfield, when the horses had grown tired. There is a wonderful high route between Weedon (a village based around a couple of farms) and Aston Abbots
(associated with the bishop of St Albans) via Burston Hill (recorded by Leland) [18]. The view across the Vale is remarkable and unobstructed and any potential problem can be seen from miles away. This was important as the head drover very often went ahead of his herd to arrange lodgings and pasture for the night. He needed to know his animals and boys were safe. This route (part of which is now a bridleway) went by way of Wing to Leighton Buzzard market. The cattle market here was once a rival to Barnet Fair (and visited prior to reaching Barnet). This route is below the scarp but in plain view of the Chilterns but there are also examples of this on the plateau itself - the route across Studham common and the high ground above the Gade valley is one example, and Gaddesden Row to Redbourn and Harpenden is another one with fine views. At Chartridge, to the west of Chesham, there are reputed to be views along the Chess valley all the way into London; although we must remember here that former common land has been allowed to become invaded by trees and shrubs (such as holly and elder) and has not been maintained for grazing.

Clue 4 : Wayside Markers

A lot has been written on this subject, especially the idea that Welsh and Scots drovers planted Scots pine seedlings (or buried their cones) along the way, or farmers enroute did so to entice drovers to stop for the night. The idea even pops up in Richard Mabey's *Flora Britannica*, and is enthusiastically endorsed by John Trimmer and Bruce Smith. An example on the ground might be a line of pine trees at the top of Downley, hogging the skyline as you approach up the road from the Hughenden valley.

As far as the Chilterns are concerned, there were other landscape features suitable as way markers - easily visible from a long distance. Ivinghoe Beacon, for example, with its distinctive conical shape, or the chalk cross and triangle cut in the side of Whiteleaf Hill (seen from afar). The cross itself probably dates back to the medieval period but the triangle, pointing towards the summit of the hill, could be somewhat older. There is a kidney shaped Neolithic barrow on the hill top, nesting in a direct line with the triangle pointing upwards, only a matter of feet away. Drovers could have made use of its existence, whatever period it was constructed, and another cross on Wain Hill near Bledlow could have served a similar function - as could the Watlington mark. All are visible from the Icknield Way suggesting drovers preferred to stay close to the spring line. However, we may note a lane runs up the side of Whiteleaf Hill towards Missenden, a day's drove away. At Cadsden there is an isolated pub, the Plough, situated at the head of a dry valley or coombe and appears to have enough land to accommodate a herd of cattle overnight. This coombe has an interesting geology in that it is thought to mark an ancient river course way back in the Ice Ages (during an interglacial) and has never been ploughed (which belies the pub name) (www.bucksgeology.org.uk).

Beacon Hill, with its distinctive elongated shape with a rounded stub end, rises above Butlers Cross, and can be picked out miles away. The same can be said of Lodge Hill - across the other side of the Saunderton Gap. The valley is wide at the Princes Risborough end but, in the opposite direction, it narrows as it approaches Bradenham and West Wycombe. This is reputed to be one of the oldest route-ways in the Chilterns, going back to the Roman period and earlier - and no doubt it could have been used by drovers (calling in at Thame and Bicester markets to sell off lame animals and purchase replacements).

Further north, the medieval motte on the chalk spur at Totternhoe would have made a prominent landmark. Hippisley Cox, in his book, *The Green Roads of England* (1913), described travelling past Totternhoe, which is close to the Maiden Bower hill fort and below the Five Knolls barrows on Dunstable Downs. Drovers coming from Leighton Buzzard had both Totternhoe and Ivinghoe Beacon to aim at, or a point between the two. This goes by way of Edlesborough church which occupies a prominent hillock, mound like, squatting
above the modern road, which then makes its way to Dagnall. On a different trajectory we have Southend Hill (Hippisley Cox called it Cheddington Hill), a chalk outlier in sight of Ivinghoe Beacon (both are capped by Iron Age hillforts) [19]. A ridge of high ground south of Leighton Buzzard separates the catchment of the river Thame from the catchment of the Ouzel (see Map 8). Defoe described the former as draining the whole of the Vale, in a multitude of streams, one of which rose near Tring, eventually forming a substantial river near the town of Thame [20].

Clue 5 : Place Names as drove markers
Place names also indicate the presence of drovers. The use of the word “drove” for example, as in Drovers Lane and The Drovers pub at Southend, the southern end of Turville Heath. The Welsh Lane out of Buckingham, leading to the Midlands and North Wales, is an obvious place name connection - but we also have the derivation of the Icknield Way to consider. This may come from Anglo Saxon ycken or yoken which according to Bauer had the meaning of oxen. Peake suggested the Icknield Way basically had the meaning of ‘Ox Drove’ [21]. It pops up in various place names such as Ickenhain in Middlesex, and Ickford near Wheatley, on a major route to the royal palace that existed at Brill. The prehistoric origin of the Icknield Way is now treated with caution by historians, but there is no doubt it was used as a green lane in the historical period and drovers from Wales and the West country would have taken advantage of the fact it made its way around London, providing a route to St Faith’s fair at Norwich, one of the biggest livestock fairs in the country.

Bruce Smith mentioned the term ‘gore’ meaning a triangular field, in which cattle were funnelled, and these were used to pasture and contain drove herds. Burnham Gore is a piece of grassland that has all the attributes we might attach to manorial waste - a piece of common land which was used by locals to graze their animals (or by drovers passing through the area). Burnham Gore is situated on the road between the village of Dorney, on the Thames, and its piece of upland pasture (within the parish of Burnham) still known as Dorneywood. The Gore would have made a stopping point on the way to the upland and should not be assumed to have a connection with long distance drovers - although they could have used it on a temporary basis. There was a Thames crossing point near Dorney (according to Michael Bayley), a ford used by drovers in his grandfather’s day (the 19th century) [22].

Clue 6 : Little London as a Royal connection
John Trimmer has a web site, www.llundainfach.co.uk, which is dedicated to Welsh drovers. He has accumulated a lot of evidence to indicate the place name Little London has a connection with them - but not necessarily during recent centuries. The evidence appears to indicate the term Little London may go back prior to the 17th century. The basis of this argument involves their propensity to have a connection with royalty - and therefore the droving trade that supplied royal households and land-holdings (which were many). One example is Oakley, on the edge of a huge tract of royal hunting grounds that included Brill (and its palace). In the Chilterns, we have Little London near Wendover, where the manor
was in the hands of the Crown until sold by Elizabeth I, and Little London at Whitchurch, near the royal owned great field of Creslow (and so on). Bruce Smith also has a web site, www.localdrovers.co.uk, and adds some further names to that, such as Piccadilly and Coldharbour. The origin of the latter is a source of controversy in academic circles and is more likely associated with pack horse teams (a harbour, or temporary shelter in bad weather).

Surprisingly, or perhaps not so, Coldharbours very often occur close to Little Londons, which may imply drovers also took advantage of old pack horse routes. They may have used them in the Chilterns too, or used parts of the old pack horse routes, but avoiding the narrow stretches. For example, looking at a map of Chesham one can see roads radiating out of it in all directions, very often along the dry valley bottoms or along the ridges above those valleys. The same situation can be seen when looking at the plateau above Ivinghoe and Aldbury, with a succession of roads along the valley bottoms, and others running along high ridge formations. Gaddesden Row, for example, probably has an origin as a pack horse route, but it is wide enough to have been used by drovers and has the necessary isolated pub, the Chequers. Gaddesden Row splits into two routes, one running through Redbourn to Harpenden (with its common, Little London, and Coldharbour). The other route goes south via what was High Street Green (marked on all the early OS maps) which appears to have been a green road (possibly even a Roman road) with wide hedge margins [23]. This is largely overgrown nowadays, but it led down through Leverstock Green to St Albans or Barnet by way of Bricket Wood common (see Map 9).

Map 9 Ordnance Survey 1822

Clue 7: Climate

Between 1600 and 1870, a period of continued low temperatures in Europe and North America led to the term Little Ice Age [24]. Excess rain led to grain rotting in the fields and lower temperatures resulted in a shorter growing season, thus leading to poor harvests and famine which mostly affected the poor. In the 18th century, exceptionally bad weather in Scotland, particularly in the 1740s, gave impetus to the Jacobite rebellion (1745), which was followed by the Highland Clearances. Landowners removed crofters from their lands and replaced them mainly with sheep, having reached the conclusion arable agriculture was marginal. However, highland cattle were unaffected by the weather and the drove trade changed gear and became even bigger than before, due to the increase in sheep numbers. Livestock was brought to the Falkirk Trysts (ie markets) from the islands and the highlands prior to being taken south [25].

A similar situation prevailed in Wales and the West Country. Pasture was poor on the Welsh hills and the cattle were small in comparison with English breeds. They were known as runts, but their saving grace was hardiness. Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries the Welsh blacks were improved, doubling in size and weight to accommodate the needs of
the meat market. The weather played a role in the expansion of the drove trade. Hill farmers have a reliable resource, their grass. However, even the quality of the turf suffered during cold and wet weather - which shortened the growing season. In contrast, the grass remained lush across the Midlands and in the Home Counties, including East Anglia. This led to a completely new economic activity, the fattening trade, and fortunes were made. It also meant the Welsh and the Scots did not always have to go to London but could dispose of their animals prior to coming anywhere near Smithfield. Instead, they came to the fairs which were held on a seasonal basis. Animals fattened in the Home Counties, including the Vale, could be brought to London 52 weeks of the year and a subsidiary droving trade emerged. The account books of one such drover, Lee Henry Uff, are held in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury.

Examples of local drove routes are fairly easy to spot. The first example we might explore is the relationship between Coleshill, near Amersham, and Tring in Hertfordshire. In the strip parish system, Tring was awarded an upland area at Coleshill [26], a little piece of Hertfordshire inside Buckinghamshire.

Coleshill had few inhabitants but it was blessed with two pubs, a very large pond and a windmill. The term cole, as in Coleman's wood in Holmer Green, has been interpreted as a reference to charcoal makers. We know this at Coleman's wood as there are iron bloomeries nearby that would have required charcoal to produce the necessary heat to smelt iron. The situation at Coleshill is uncertain, but again, charcoal production may have played a role as the common was host to itinerant trades. However, was it used for summer pasture by the people of Tring? It has been suggested, by John Trimmer, they had use of common land near Cholesbury, whilst Defoe records a dispute between a landowner in Tring, who tried to enclose part of Wiggington common, but was thwarted by the commoners who were prepared to defend their ancient rights. If people in Tring took livestock to Coleshill, it is not particularly difficult as there is a direct route using common land/manorial waste running along the boundary between Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire via Cholesbury common and Hawridge to Chesham (with an isolated pub on the way) and across Chesham Bois and down into Amersham. At that point it was only a matter of going up Gore Hill to Coldharbour (those names again) which was situated on the edge of Coleshill. This little bit of Hertfordshire became a refuge for religious nonconformists in the reign of Charles II, another story.

The turnpike road between Amersham and Beaconsfield did not exist in the 17th century (see Map 10). Instead, the road went by way of Winchmore Hill and Penn Street, along Clay Lane to Knotty Green. At Beaconsfield crossroads it continued all the way to Windsor.

Coleshill, being part of Hertfordshire, was by-passed, until the turnpike was built in the late 18th century [27].
A series of hollow ways have been cut out of the scarp ascent from Little Missenden to Holmer Green, made by generations of farmers taking their animals up to what was then Wycombe Heath. This includes King Street Lane and Penfold Lane (pen and fold refer to a place where animals were penned, or a pound). Featherbed Lane ran from the heath down to the manor farm at Africks, which developed into Little Kingshill [28].

You may also note Watchet Lane on the west side of Map 11. This was originally Watts Hatch Lane but somebody mistranslated the local dialect, as they were inclined to do, and wrote it as Watchet (which is a town in Somerset). Watchet Lane would have been a track over the heath, a route from Wycombe to Missenden Abbey by way of Africks. Watts Hatch lies in a hollow in a strip of woodland and is now workshops (formerly a farm) and the settlement has migrated up the hill to Little Kingshill.

Harpenden in Hertfordshire and Harpsden near Henley-on-Thames, both situated in the Chilterns, are place names derived from a here (path) and a dene (a dry chalk valley). Harpsden is in effect the natural route to the uplands, taking the slowly ascending way rather than climbing steeply, on to Rotherfield common (ather being a word denoting cattle pasture). Another fairly obvious example is Sheepbridge Lane which runs from Little Marlow to the upland of Flackwell Heath. It even has the isolated Crooked Billet pub halfway up the hill, and widely spaced hedges.

An example of a drover using the turnpike road is Lee Henry Uff. His account books ended up in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies only because he went bankrupt - and they were held by the court. In the 1820s he was making a weekly drove of cattle from either Bicester or Buckingham, the destination being Southall which at that time had developed into a major market for London butchers [29]. He paid his tolls but also made use of common land (possibly manorial waste) at Ham Green near Kingswood, and the more extensive Hillingdon Heath (which can be seen on early OS maps). He also paid for his lodgings on a succession of nights at undefined pubs. One example was the Ivy House, with a field and access to the Misbourne, which still exists in spite of being in an isolated position. He also paid a toll at Walton gate (which is on the eastern side of Aylesbury) and then pitched nearby for the night. Outside the modern police station there are two large ponds and in what was the old village of Walton there are four

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Map 11 Chiltern Society  
Footpath Map 6  

Long Distance Drovers

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Shirley Toulson has a similar map in “The Drovers” Shire Books (1988) pp 42-3. These maps are not exact but rough guides to the routes taken across the Chilterns. Toulson’s work is mainly centred on Wales and that part of England bordering the principality. Outside that area, it is all guesswork!
pubs, all close to each other. Near one of the ponds is another, the Broad Leys pub. This suggests it had a field or fields attached. Lee Henry Uff made regular weekly droves over many years, stopping at the same places for the night, and he records the whereabouts of all the toll gates (which were paid without any evidence of rancour). After Walton, the next gate was at Missenden, then at the Chalfonts, and finally at Uxbridge. He also lists the gates on the road from Bicester, and those on the turnpike from Buckingham.

Colyer claimed a lot of Welsh drovers used the turnpikes and the above accounts appear to bear this out. However, he also said that many drovers did not. They got up to all kinds of tricks to avoid toll gates, from short diversions from the turnpike to alternative routes which in the Chilterns would have involved making use of the high ground, the commons, and their ponds. Note, this is fairly late in the life of most commons and the landowners were less willing to uphold common rights; they had an eye on enclosure which was happening in other parts of the country. The seasonal and occasional overnight stay by long distance drovers mattered very little - all grist to the mill. It probably involved local agreements. We actually have an example of this somewhere in the parish of Hughenden [30]. The Western Mail (Cardiff) of Monday 28th January 1895, in a column ‘Wales Day by Day’, reads - ‘a legend dies hard, especially where there is some practical benefit attending its preservation. To this day Welsh drovers taking cattle to London, pasture their herds freely on the heath and common land near Hughenden. So the story runs that, once upon a time, a great battle was raging there between the Saxons and the Danes when a party of Britons coming up gave their aid to the Saxons who thus won the day. In memory of this .... valley is free for Welshmen’ [31]. The newspaper actually describes it as a legend - or a very ancient incident. It also says it was a place near Hughenden (and not necessarily within Hughenden). It seems we might actually have a Welsh record of drovers making use of Downley or Naphill common in the 18th or 19th centuries.

However, all had not been roses for Welsh drovers as they were sometimes likened to ‘able bodied beggars’ [32] and it became necessary for them to carry their droving licences with them in order to avoid being imprisoned or coerced into local labouring projects, or even driven out of town without their animals. This law was revoked from the Statute Book in the 1770s - rather late in the day; it had been initiated by Henry IV for various reasons.

In general, market towns were laid out in the medieval period, which would include the Missendens, Wendover, and Amersham, and the roads leading in and out of them would not have changed a great deal - which is what Ogilby's maps of the late 17th century show. Turnpikes improved the roads, and may have had a slightly different trajectory between the towns, but in general the change was slight. Alternatives involved the old pack horse routes, a trade that was on its last legs. For example, one pack horse route appears to have run out of Wendover; Coldharbour Terrace is a row of thatched roof 16th century cottages (with The Pack Horse pub on the end), and following the road directly opposite them, running at the back of the town, went past the church (now in an isolated position) to Well End (the well at the end of the old town) where there was another pub (now closed) and continued down Hogstrough Lane, a deep hollow way that has been subsumed within the Ridgeway national footpath.

This bridleway emerges at Kings Ash. Here the route forks, Kings Lane is a fairly straight and wide lane that ends up at South Heath and Hyde Heath, situated on a high plateau above Great Missenden. It may be that this was a packhorse route but used primarily by local farmers. In fact, the King in the name is not a reference to royalty but is a common surname in the area, including local farmers. The King family owned Town End farm in Little Missenden, for example, but see www.stuartking.co.uk for some information on them.

Pack horse routes
Moving from what might be described as reasoned speculation, we have an interview with an old chap living in Hyde Heath, one Bernard Beardmore [33]. He was a boy during the 1930s and a lad in the WWII years. He had a teacher, he said, an old country chap, not a teacher of reading and writing but a bit of a character who was teaching them a spot of horticulture as part of the Dig for Britain government campaign. The village children grew potatoes, among other things, during the war to augment rations and for their school dinners. Anyway, this teacher left a lasting impression on Bernard, regaling his young charges with tales of the late 19th century, and these included stories about Welsh drovers who stopped overnight on the common before moving on in the direction, he said, of Watford. He claimed the drovers came by way of South Heath and Ballinger common, and the village (with pond) of The Lee (just up the lane from Kings Ash) (see Map 13). So, we have two possible lines of travel out of Wendover to avoid the toll gates. From Hyde Heath (see Map 14) he thought they made their way down to Amersham common by way of Weedon Farm, where there was a pond - but this appears to be located in the farmyard and therefore a general line to Chesham Bois might be in order, with ponds. The term *bois* is Norman French for *bush* or *thicket* - as in Bushey near Watford, Shepherds Bush in Middlesex, Harlow Bush in Hertfordshire, and Blackbushe in Surrey. In effect it is another word for a common or heath. There is still a pond at Hyde Heath and a few houses, notably Troy House. When this was being renovated around 30 years ago, a huge bread oven was found and Bernard had the idea that drovers were being supplied with victuals, including fresh bread. However, bread ovens were common in houses of substance at that time but it is an interesting idea. According to Bernard there were three pubs on the commonside in his youth, the Plough, the Eagle, and the Red Cow, and in addition, at the top of Frith Hill, in an isolated position once again, there was the Barley Mow (now boarded up). Bernard claimed that Edwards and Evans were
surnames to be found in the village when he was younger, indicating some of the drovers may have settled down. Bernard's teacher, if he was 60, would have been born in the late 19th century and may have related what he or his father and grandfather had witnessed.

G Edmonds, in the 1860s, came from Gloucester to the Metropolitan Market in Kentish Town, by way of Princes Risborough, Hampden, and Great Missenden, and seems to have avoided the toll gates. It is likely that he also went by way of Hyde Heath, and this appears to support Bernard's story [34].

From Chesham Bois (see Map 15) a route through the Chess river valley might be worth exploring, leading as it would to the outskirts of Watford (as Bernard said) but drovers seeking to miss out toll gates on the A413 may have gone via Amersham common (which stretched as far east to what is now Little Chalfont) and turned south on the road to Chalfont St Giles (which has wide verges) (see Map 16), veering off at Shortenhills common which naturally led into Chalfont common (above Chalfont St Peter), past Chalfont Lodge and along Slade Lane and down the hill to Denham village. Here there was a ford across the Colne, behind the church, and then by way of Ickenham and Long Lane to Hillingdon (a large tract of heath). Three toll gates could be avoided just by doing this diversion from Great Missenden.
From Buckingham, Welsh drovers could go by way of the Wendover Gap. Alternatively, if they were heading towards Barnet Fair or Essex they would have gone via Leighton Buzzard (an important livestock market) [35]. This provided a direct link to the two upland ridges that run across Hertfordshire, one on the high chalk where the Icknield Way ran on its journey to the Cambridgeshire hills - and all points beyond (as described by Hippisley Cox). This divides the catchment of the Ouse from the catchment of the Thames. The other is a terrace formation above the London Clay, a sort of lip on the edge of a bowl [36]. The chalk bedrock here has been buckled and forms a huge basin that was subsequently filled in with London Clay deposit. The line of the ridge runs across Bushey Heath to Elstree, Arkeley, High Barnet, and Epping Green [37].

In all instances, drovers moved east from Buckingham across the high ground of the Greensand geology, via Swanbourne, Mursley, and Wing, reaching Leighton Buzzard. Here the natural lie of the land led to the scarp break between Totternhoe and Ivinghoe, the Dagnall Gap. This ran roughly along the county boundary between Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire (once again). See Map 17 which also shows the springs and streams at the Dagnall Gap.

In the vicinity of Ivinghoe (see Map 18), below the scarp, there are two gullies, or coombes, ideal for holding livestock overnight. A chap from Weston Turville, who lived at Ivinghoe as a lad, said you can see one of these from the top of Ivinghoe Beacon. John Trimmer supplied an exact location. Incombe Hole, beneath the Beacon, at SP959159, and Coombe Hole at SP966172, were formed as a result of water and ice, and freeze and thaw, during the Ice Ages. Pitstone Hill, nearby, has a section of the enigmatic Grim’s Ditch overlooking the scarp edge - and there is another section at Steps Hill. Aerial photography has picked out a series of hollow ways, some with a deep V shape formed by the feet of cattle over many centuries, ascending the scarp (Dyer and Hale, archaeological survey in the 1960s).

Little Gaddesden, reached directly from Ivinghoe, has a large pond and is blessed with very wide verges - the houses, some of which belong to the National Trust, are set way back. The church, however, is half a mile away, and it is thought the original
village was built on a former Roman road that has since been lost. A view from the graveyard looks across the Ashridge estate towards the Dagnall Gap and Whipsnade.

However, there is another route from the vicinity of Ivinghoe, and this may go all the way back to the Plantagenet kings, leading as it does to Kings Langley Palace and Berkhamsted castle (also a substantial palace). In the 19th century this route became unattractive as the Bulbourne valley had a lot of mills, heavy traffic, and several prominent towns, as well as the Grand Union Canal and the railway. Instead of threading a way across the plateau beyond the escarpment, large tracts of which was common land (with rights), Welsh drovers in all likelihood reached their royal markets by the existing road system. The road to Aldbury over Pitstone Hill (Stocks Lane only goes back to the 19th century and enclosure changes, although there may have been a track) runs down to the A41 (Akeman Street, a former Roman road). Cow Roast does not seem to be a place name on early maps - but an isolated inn is marked (see Map 19). A field attached to the inn may have provided grazing, but most importantly, the locality of Cow Roast was historically associated with springs that fed the Bulbourne stream. In the 18th or 19th century water was pumped from the chalk aquifer to feed the canal on its journey across Tring summit, and the Bulbourne now rises near Dudswell, a mile or so down the valley [38]. Cow Roast was formerly known as Cow Rest (according to a notice board by the lock on the canal) which would reflect a drover connection, an idea that suggests some publican changed the name to attract a new kind of clientele [39].

The line of the turnpike, and modern road, runs at a slightly lower level to that of Akeman Street, which probably survived into the late medieval period. Parts of it are preserved near Boxmoor, running parallel with the modern road, but much of the former course has been lost by the construction of the canal and railway. At Mill End the Bulbourne joins the Gade and this enlarged river flows south of Watford, through what had been the grand estate at Cassiobury Park, and eventually merges with the Colne.

Covered in dust and smelling of animal dung kicked up by the feet of cattle, drovers were the sort of people to keep downwind. They were also inclined to drink a lot of ale and, being generally unkempt, were avoided by the great and the good. In other respects they were far from rogues; the head drover was in charge of valuable beasts, and on the return journey carried large sums of money. Farmers passed their animals over to the drover and expected a return, which was duly delivered in hard cash (carried all the way from the London area). The integrity of the drover amongst the farmers was paramount and we have no way of knowing how often they were waylaid and robbed. Eventually, one of them had the bright idea of setting up a bank, the Black Ox, in Wales. This later merged with Lloyds, the Black Horse, but the idea of a bank meant that promissory notes could be written and
the farmer and the drover were both protected financially. It is also known that some drovers were esteemed enough to be entrusted with rent money paid to absentee landlords in London (and elsewhere) [40]. Charles I used drovers to collect Ship Money in Wales and Cromwell also used them to collect taxes. At the time of the civil war, in the mid-17th century, drovers had something of a dispensation, treated by both sides as neutrals, even though the Welsh in general supported the Royalist cause [41]. The reason was that the Parliamentary army relied on them for meat just as much as the Royalists, which illustrates just how entrenched the trade had become.

The word drift is an alternative to drove and occurs most often in East Anglia - but we have what was known as the Pyrton Drift Way in Oxfordshire (see Map 20) [42].

On modern maps it is now known as the Oxfordshire Way, a long-distance footpath that has suitably taken over the mantle of an old route. It has been suggested that although the route was used by local farmers in the Vale to move their animals on to the escarpment in the summer at Christmas Common and Turville Heath, it was also used by long-distance drovers coming from Worcester via Chipping Norton, Islip and Wheatley. Instead of following the line of the A40, they cut diagonally across the Vale by way of Haseley to Pyrton via what is now the Stoney Lane bridleway and Knightsbridge Lane and the base of the scarp. The obvious route up the scarp is by way of Watlington Hill, which leads directly on to Christmas Common and Northend (to the south-east) where there were commons, large ponds and pubs.

Here they might have taken one of two routes, possibly from Christmas Common via Hollandridge Lane to Stonor and then Henley with its river crossing and markets. The other possible route was from Northend via Turville Heath along Drovers Lane to The Drovers pub at Southend (now closed) and down the Hambleden valley to the River Thames (see Map 21).

Why would they do this? - to avoid tolls is the obvious answer, and to avoid the town of Wycombe and its busy stream with its mills. They may also have earned rights of passage. The route avoids the town of Watlington by crossing the main road and joining up with the Icknield Way, the section directly below Christmas Common. This short stretch has one hedge on just one side of the track - but this is dense and thick and very wide, and a distinct barrier to the fields behind. It is full of wildlife, and is a pleasant walk in the summer. Drove routes had hedges to avoid contact with local livestock, but tracks through land without animals did not necessarily require a hedge - hence the single example. Local
drove routes up from the Assendons to Southend and Summerheath, or from Lewknor and Chinnor, occur all the way along the scarp in Oxfordshire. Any one of them could have been adopted by the seasonal Welsh drover. Steep hills presented no problem as the cattle were reared in a mountainous landscape.

Lots of possible routes can be visualised - but this is where the guess work comes in. I’m sure lots of people can find intimations of drove routes anywhere in the Chilterns, and suggestions would be welcome.

Map 21 Ordnance Survey 1822
References:


2) Richard Colyer, article in the National Library of Wales Journal (1972) - which can be read at www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/CattleDrovers1.html. Also see Hepple and Doggett, *The Chilterns* Phillimore (1994) p 155


8) A scanned version of John Ogilby's maps can be purchased via ECCO Print Editions (reproduced from the British Library original) but they can also be found at various locations on the Internet.

9) Dean here appears to be a variation on Down, a chalk hill, or high ground. The main point here is that it was dry.

10) Barnet Fair was big - a major event in the calendar for Londoners as well as drovers hoping to fetch a good price directly from London butchers. To get an idea – see www.barnet4u.co.uk/Barnethistory/BarnetFair/barnetfair.html but see also David Kerr Cameron. *The English Fair*, Sutton Publishing (1998) chapter 6 'Beef on the Slithering Hoof' pp 72-93

11) This was known as Haveringdown. See *Conservation Area Character Survey for West Wycombe* (2005) which can be downloaded from the Internet. The church of St Lawrence (on the hill) is separate from the present village which indicates it was built to serve a community living on the hill, referred to in early documents as Haveringdown - which survives as a nearby farm name. The church itself was built within the banks and ditches of an Iron Age hill fort and there is evidence of prehistoric field systems on the hills. The present village originated as a planned settlement during the medieval period - contiguous with the manor house. *The Victoria County History* (Buckinghamshire, volume 3) also records the earlier settlement. Incidentally, the oldest building in the village, Church Loft, has been dated to the 15th century as it used trees felled in 1420/30 (dendrochronology sample).

12) The pedestal monument was built to commemorate the completion of the new road, at the junction with the turnpike to Princes Risborough. It was erected on a small triangle of grass - what was there before?

13) John Trimmer suggested this as a way out of a dilemma but clearly they could have gone down the hill to Hughenden Valley - and even up Green Hill to Wycombe Heath. Who knows?

14) This again is guesswork but there are ponds at Cadmore End, Bolter End, Lane End, Booker common, possibly at Handy Cross and what was Limmer Green, and definitely at Flackwell Heath, crossing the river at Wooburn Green, and so on.

15) *History of Hemel Hempstead*, Local History and Records Society publication (1973) - the manor house and church are also located on the ridge above the Gade flood plain (indicating it was a regular occurrence for it to overflow its banks, as it did in 2013). It is now occupied by a park, recreation ground, bowls green, skate park, and garden.

16) Any vestige of common land or waste has now disappeared as a result of enclosure and/or overgrowth. In an interview with the vicar of West Wycombe, who also has jurisdiction over Radnage church, he was convinced the pre-turnpike route went to Green End and Radnage. The only settlements on the present A40 are recent, such as Piddington (which grew up around a furniture factory).

17) Gantzel associates it with the movement of sheep - even long distance movements of sheep.

18) John Leland, a journey from Aylesbury to Uxbridge in the 1520s. The 'Itinerary' has been reproduced in facsimile.
19) Southend hill fort was discovered by aerial photography (most of it is ploughed away), pers. comm. Mike Farley (former county archaeologist for Buckinghamshire). Hippisley Cox fails to mention it in 1913, which suggests it wasn't obvious then. It is marked on early OS maps as lynchetts.

20) See also Tony Chaplin, 'River Thame, old Chiltern's Son' (History and Guide) Tempus (2007)

21) Peake, 'Ancient Tracks over English Downs' Geographical Review 29:4 (1939)

22) Michael Bayley, 'Maidenhead, its Seal and its Bridges' and 'The Survival of the Lowland British Language'

23) 'History of Hemel Hempstead', Local History and Records Society publications (1973) - also describes how construction building work on the New Town came across thick deposits of peat (on Gadebridge Moor, for example, and Boxmoor). Also P Colebourne and B Gibbons, 'Britain's Countryside History: a guide to the landscape', Blandford (1990) p 159


25) This is described by Shirley Toulson, 'The Drovers', Shire Books (2005). Shire also publishes another little book by Toulson, 'Last Trade Routes'.

26) John Chevenix-Trench, 'Coleshill and the Settlement of the Chilterns' in Records of Bucks (1973)

27) See also map 12 taken from Bonser op cit and reproduced by Toulson op cit, which is understandable as they are not local to the south-east. Toulson, in one of her books, even has Naphill common marked as a drove route - without acknowledgement but presumably the Naphill web site. It seems that Bonser and Toulson might be guessing as much as anyone else when it comes to pinning down routes. The Naphill mention is on p 46 and she even repeats the claim about a Portuguese laurel on Downley/Naphill common. The Internet is a fine source of data but even the best scholars can be seduced and take statements at face value when dealing with a region they are unfamiliar with. It is worth reiterating here that Toulson thought the drovers did use the commons on the Chilterns - and says so quite clearly. Also see www.naphillcommon.org.uk/oral_history.html


29) Michael Robbins, 'Middlesex' (1953) - but see the 2003 edition

30) McLain-Smith and Riches op cit and David Gantzel, 'Hazlemere' (copies in local libraries including Amersham, Hazlemere, High Wycombe, and no doubt others). Gantzel worked for the Bucks Free Press. The green road with its manorial waste can be clearly seen on the first OS maps but is more pronounced on Bryant's map of Buckinghamshire (1825) and on maps that can be viewed in Hazlemere Parish Council offices.

31) The original photocopy can be accessed at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk but there is an ink smudge on these two important missing words rendering them unreadable. However, it is clear the Welsh claimed some ancient right of passage and free pasture somewhere in the parish of Hughenden. Downley common and a large slice of Naphill common is in West Wycombe parish and this caused Gantzel op cit to think in terms of a valley location in Hazlemere (then in Hughenden parish), along Eastern Dene (in the shadow of Inkerman Hill, with a still wooded hill behind the houses on the other side of the road). We have (something) (something) Valley and it is not Hughenden Manor Valley as the second word appears to begin with a t - so we must assume it is Hughenden Valley (prior to the modern housing) at the bottom of Cryers Hill, which has a few farms and springs feeding the seasonal Hughenden stream (a pumping station has replaced the springs), which appears to be a good location for a drover stop-over (with the Harrow pub nearby). The valley location is beneath the hill on which Naphill common was located, a much bigger acreage than at present. In effect, it allows a link with Naphill common, in order to by-pass High Wycombe, on the one side, and Wycombe Heath on the other.

32) Tawney and Power, 'Tudor Economic Documents' volume 3

33) The contact with Imelda and Bernard Beardmore was made through John Capper who took part in the Chilterns Conservation Board's Commons Day meeting at Hyde Heath in 2012. He said he was informed there were three ponds at Hyde Heath, at one time.

34) John Trimmer suggested this.
35) Bruce Smith, John Trimmer. Leighton Buzzard already had a market in the Domesday Survey.
37) David Kerr Cameron op cit chapter 9 ‘By River and Pack Horse Train’ - p 167 lists some of the fairs around London. In Idris Evans, ‘Hard Road to London’ Ruthin Press (2008), the drovers head out of Wales for Billericay (and other known droves made for the same small market town, as mentioned by Toulson op cit). Unfortunately Idris Evans does not mention the way they went after leaving Wales - only their destination.
39) The change of name from Cow Rest to Cow Roast may be guesswork - but it has obviously been repeated by a lot of people including by the Canal quango responsible for the information board. Its other claim to fame is that Roman period remains have been found there. See www.hertfordshire-genealogy.co.uk/data/places/places-c/cow-roast/!-cow-roast-frame.html.
40) Stephen Friar, ‘Local History Companion’ pp 128-130
41) Bruce Smith op cit
42) Colyer, Toulson, Bonser, Trimmer op cit
I offered to look into the history of the “dipping well” at the ponds about 18 months ago when I first moved to Woodcote. This research has taken a friend and me to several record offices to look at old minutes and original documents. In addition to our local library, these included the Oxford Record Office and the Guildhall Library in London, the Bodleian Library and Christchurch Library in Oxford. I have also spoken to many villagers. It has been fascinating. Below is a summary of some of our discoveries.

Before the 20th century, water supply was a problem in the Chilterns. In addition to stored rainwater, supplies were obtained from springs and wells, which were preferred, and from ponds - the main sources in many areas - in which contamination was difficult to avoid.

Following the establishment of Sanitary Authorities in 1872, a Medical Officer of Health and an Inspector of Nuisances were appointed by each local authority. In 1898 the local Inspector of Nuisances, Mr Woodforde (a sanitary inspector), wrote a report about Woodcote’s water supply. What did he find? What did he recommend? What did the Parish Council do?

Imagine a very large common or heath, stretching from the village hall to the Greenmoor ponds. Along its edges there are three small hamlets: Exlade Street (Lower Woodcote), Greenmoor Hill and South Stoke cum Woodcote. Around 1898, the people of these places were living in very rural communities, where the living conditions were mainly very poor and their water supply was meagre. All homes had rainwater cisterns. Some of these were brick-built, above ground, maybe with a slight curvature on the top, about six feet deep and fed by pipes from the roof gutters. Some were underground tanks which were also fed from the roofs of the houses and may have been topped up by a water pump. These cisterns can still be seen in many Woodcote gardens today. In some places the original building that fed the cistern has disappeared and the brick topping can be seen situated in a position without apparent reason. When the cisterns became empty the villagers used the ponds for their water supply.

In 1898, there were two main ponds. One was called Clay Pits, at the bottom of Greenmoor Hill opposite a Mr Smith’s shop. The shop still exists. This pond had railings around it, some stone steps into it, and ducks swam on it. It was filled by rainwater and was 1 rood 38 poles in area (nearly half an acre). It often became empty. It was cleaned out by the Parish Council in 1897. The remains of this pond can still be seen at the bottom of Greenmoor. The bungalows were built on it in the 1970s.

The other pond, called the Canal, at the top of Greenmoor where there are two ponds. The Canal is the larger of the two, at 1 acre 1 rood and 36 poles (nearly 1½ acres) and also had
stone steps into it. The Canal never became dry and was always reliable as a source of water.

During the time that the Inspector of Nuisances was compiling his report, the Parish Council recognised that there was insufficient water for the local population but could not agree on the best plan to improve the supply. Their favoured plan was to sink a very deep well by the Canal and raise water by means of a wind engine. The water would be piped to the pond which would become a reservoir. This scheme would only cost £500 and would involve taking a loan repayable over 30 years. The Chairman felt that this would increase the prosperity of the area.

An alternative scheme involved piping water from the Goring and Whitchurch Water Company to the villagers’ homes. This would require a loan of £1,000 and the people would then have to pay for the water they used.

The Chairman of the Parish Council wrote to the Local Government Board requesting a loan for the cheaper alternative. This was turned down on health grounds.

The Inspector of Nuisances, Mr Woodforde, recommended that pond filters be placed by both ponds to improve the water quality and that is what we call our dipping well. It is not very deep and contained layers of gravel and/or charcoal. The pond water was fed to the filter (the dipping well) by a pipe from the pond and, as it rose up through the layers of gravel and/or charcoal, it was filtered. It was recorded in the Crowmarsh Rural District Council Minutes in 1898 that one filter should be installed at each pond. The filters/dipping wells would have been a common sight in the village at that time, hence the lack of many written records about them. The cap was probably placed on the filter some time after the Second World War, but the Woodcote Parish records for that period are missing.

The land on which the Greenmoor ponds lie used to belong not to Christchurch, Oxford, but to Christ's Hospital School, London. The School owned Greenmoor Hill Farm and exchanged a piece of land which they owned by the river at South Stoke for the piece next to their farm at Inclosure in 1853. They must have forgotten about their ownership when our Parish Council claimed it as Common Land for our village on 21st November 1973.

![Lower pond, Greenmoor Ponds, Woodcote](image)
The location of Greenmoor Hill ponds

Footnote:

1 rod = 5½ yards  
1 pole = 5½ yards  
1 perch = 5½ yards  
1 (square) rod = 30¼ square yards  
1 (square) pole = 30¼ square yards  
1 (square) perch = 30¼ square yards

40 square yards or square poles or square perches = 1 rood (1,210 square yards)  
4 roods = 1 acre (4,840 square yards)

Rods, poles and perches were used as measures both of length and or area, and were understood from the context. Nowadays we use metres in the same way as a measure of length and of area and of volume and, according to the context, people understand metre, square metre or cubic metre accordingly.
The Chilterns stretch in a south-west to north-east direction, from Goring-on-Thames in Oxfordshire to the commons at Woodcote and Nettlebed and Stokenchurch, through Buckinghamshire where the commons include those at Naphill, Hawridge and Cholesbury, then into Hertfordshire and the common land at Berkhamsted and Northchurch, reaching close to Hitchin, but also taking in the Bedfordshire commons of Whipsnade Heath and Dunstable Downs. The sites of the commons themselves, together with newspaper reports and records from preceding centuries, allow us a glimpse of the economic and social life of those who lived and worked on the commons, many of whom were Romanies and Travellers - the people known as Gypsies. See Appendix for details of some of the families mentioned.

The commons at Hawridge and nearby Cholesbury provided regular camping sites for Gypsies who frequently performed the tasks of casual labour for the local farmers. Their presence is marked by the records of the period with births and marriages and, later in the century, by census records. As early as 1762 the baptism of Letitia Draper is registered in Cholesbury, the daughter of Valentine Draper, a Gypsy, and his wife. Buckinghamshire was home territory for Valentine, who also baptised Lucy at Fingest in 1778, Martha in 1782 at West Wycombe, Valentine in 1789 at High Wycombe, and Ann in Nettlebed, just over the border in Oxfordshire (uncertain, but believed to be in 1791).

Cholesbury provided rough grazing for the horses, brush for fuel, and wood for peg making and chair-mending, was a popular stopping site for Gypsies and Travellers. Many of the hawkers sold the items they made, such as pegs and brooms, the materials for which came from the commons and nearby woodland. The commons were close to farmland and casual farm labouring was another source of income for the Gypsy population. Usually staying on the commons, in tents, carts or, later in the nineteenth century, in caravans, the Gypsies could also gather broom and heath from the site to make besoms to sell, and could pasture their livestock.

Hawridge Common could sustain Romanies and Travellers throughout the year since local brick making and tile making were also common in the area. Because of the ideal quality of local clays and sand, as well as the proximity of wood for fuel, many Gypsies were involved in this occupation, the busy months being the early winter and the spring.

At Hawridge on 12th September 1814 a marriage took place between Thomas Fisher, a harvest man, “now of this parish” and Seabro/Sabrah Swift, a harvest woman. Thomas signed, Sabrah made her mark, as did the witness, Sarah Taylor. The Fisher family appear to have travelled to Hawridge for farm work quite regularly and the parish records show them baptising children and marrying in late August and early September.

The Hearn family were a significant Romany tribe who frequently worked as brick makers and the registers of Hawridge record their presence. The proximity to the various commons at Aldbury, Whipsnade and Hawridge indicate their stopping places, and confirm their territorial circuit. Many members of the Hearn tribe were churched predominantly in the area around Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, especially in Tring and Bovingdon. The Hearns were also often to be found, with other Gypsies, working in the brick kilns on the commons, especially at Aldbury and Northchurch.

Although also favouring other counties to the north, west and south of London, the Hearns were a significant presence in the Tring area of Hertfordshire. A Hertfordshire farmer recorded, as early as the 1740s, that there was a swelling of numbers of Gypsies in the
A photograph said to be of Elizabeth Leatherland, an aged Gypsy, at 107 years of age.

With kind permission of Hertfordshire County Council

area, notably Boswells and Hearns, and that “Herne (sic) had clothes of silver lace, kept a couple of race horses, was always full of money and acted as a chieftain,” adding that “this Herne got so much into the good graces of the owner of a brick kiln near Berkhamsted Common that he had leave to take possession of the brick kiln house, and it was here that he resided near half-a-year together, with near 30 Gypsy men and women, who strolled about the country.” Evidence of the Hearns in local church records date back to Senia Hearn, baptised in Berkhamsted on 3rd March 1750, the daughter of Robert Hearn, a Traveller, and Elizabeth, and buried ten days later at the same location. The Buckinghamshire Herald of 29th August 1874 was to acknowledge the significance of the Hearn family in a reference to Elizabeth Leatherland, a Hearn before her marriage:

The Gypsy family of Hearn, of which she claims to belong, is well known in the counties of Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, and was better known before the Gypsy encampments were disturbed by the law; and ‘Old Betty,’ in her red cloak a figure well known to almost everyone.

Although Elizabeth, the daughter of Thomas Hearn, was to baptise her children with Joseph Leatherland in Kent, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, it was in Tring, Hertfordshire, that she was finally laid to rest, on 23rd January 1875, claiming to be 111 years of age.

Such proximity to the commons of Northchurch and Aldbury, in particular, are significant indicators of the seasonal, but regular, occupations available for the Hearn tribe, and their presence on the commons.

In the early winter and spring the Hearns could be found in the market town of Chesham, with its common land at Ley Hill. The town sits on a bed rock of chalk, alluvial gravels and silt, and periods of subsidence and submergence deposited clays and flints, all materials required in activities such as brick making and lime burning.

Many of the Gypsies or Travellers who stopped on Chesham Common also took advantage of the nearby woodlands to make shovels, brooms, spoons and brushes from the wood available, as well as carving pegs and mending and cane bottoming chairs. The considerable area of beech throughout the Chilterns sustained these crafts.

Nevertheless, the presence on the commons of these outsiders was also a source of anxiety, as well as labour, for the local farmers and landowners. John Cartwright of Piggott’s Farm near North Dean wondered “whether I should summon Norris Hearn’s son and daughter for cutting two beech trees in Sprion Coppis”, and several Gypsies found themselves in court, prosecuted for damaging hedges, poaching, hawking without a licence, vagrancy or drunkenness.

Much of the anxiety of local landowners was unfounded, for the Romanies and Travellers gave more than they took, contributing to the life of the farms and villages in the Chilterns, and many of their descendants were to become part of the local population as social change brought about a different way of life.

By the time of the 1881 census, many of these families were still present in the local population, often having moved off the commons, but maintaining their prior occupations. Samuel Hearn, with his wife Sarah at Waterside, Chesham, is recorded as a Traveller. At Waylands, Chesham, a James Hearn, living with his wife, Bertha, and daughter Martha, is a brush hawker and at Church Street, Chesham the widowed Caroline Hearn, claiming to have been born on Ley Common, is a straw plaiter. Straw plaiting was a local industry that was a regular occupation for the wives and daughters of agricultural labourers, and was frequently
as casual as the farm labouring itself. Caroline’s son Henry is recorded as a farm labourer and another son, Richard, is a worker in wooden ware, maintaining a traditional craft.

By 1891, Samuel Hearn, a retired brush hawker, is still living at Waterside, Chesham within the ecclesiastical parish of Christ Church, with his wife, Sarah, his widowed daughter, Jane Sophia White, and his two granddaughters, Sarah Jane and Emily Annie. Both of the granddaughters are working in local industries, and leading a settled existence, Sarah Jane as a French polisher and Emily as a boot machinist.

Brick making was then a seasonal occupation and one commonly undertaken by the travelling population in the nineteenth century and earlier. Firstly, the clay had to be weathered in the winter frosts, so that it was dug out in the autumn and left over the colder months for the frost to get at it and help break it down. In the spring the clay was turned over and the stones and pebbles removed before further refinement, such as adding sand, left the clay suitable for brick making. After moulding in wooden moulds, which were coated with sand to prevent the clay from sticking, the bricks were left to dry before firing.

The baptisms of the children indicate a seasonal pattern in terms of the presence of the tribe, since tasks such as brick making were carried out in the late autumn, and then concluded in the spring when the winter weather had helped break down the clay. Sojourning (or staying somewhere temporarily) over the winter months, when travel was often difficult and sometimes impossible, meant that the Gypsies were available for the seasonal labour of brick making, so popular in the area, and could spend the winter mending their material goods, making besoms and clothes pegs and, of course, churching their children in the villages close to the common land on which they camped.

Another reason that so many Romanies and Travellers were involved in brick making was that many of the kilns could be found on the commons, frequently the poorest land in the locality. This meant that the topsoil was thin and therefore easy to strip away in order to dig out the clay necessary for making the bricks; in addition there was local woodland, gorse or brush, for firing the kilns. This made the sites where Gypsies often camped perfectly suited to this, and the Travellers provided a ready workforce, some acting as sand-carriers, as well as brick makers and brick burners.

Articles in local newspapers often focused on the brick works, which were considered such a significant part of life in the area. Reporting accidents, sale of a yard, or appealing for workers at sites, became commonplace. Whilst the workforce rarely made much money out of such seasonal activity, the owners could sometimes do very well indeed. Typical of an advertisement at the beginning of the nineteenth century is one carried in Hertfordshire’s County Chronicle of 1st June 1819, in which a Mrs Hooper, probably a widow, offered “by private contract the valuable lease and good will of a lucrative brick and lime trade at Cobden Hill”.

In addition to bricks and earthenware, the kilns were often used for lime burning, using any chalk found beneath the clay. Since lime was used to enrich the soil, farmers began to have small lime-kilns on their land, and Travellers were often useful employees, being able to act as casual agricultural labourers, as well as occasional lime-burners or brick makers. It also became common to find the job of brick maker linked with another occupation, farmer perhaps, or beer seller. It was, after all, thirsty work and such an opportunity was not to be missed!

Inevitably, the Traveller community also ran into trouble with the law on many occasions, and local newspapers recorded such events, leaving us documentary evidence of the presence of these families in the neighbourhood.
Hawker Elijah Welling, born at Lye Green, can be found on the common there, aged 16, in the 1851 census, with his parents Francis and Lydia, and siblings Eli, Rebecca, Joseph and Isaac. Eight years later, and residing at Cholesbury, he was prosecuted for hawking, presumably without a licence. By 1872 Elijah had managed to rack up sixteen previous convictions, and on this occasion was sentenced to 14 days imprisonment.

The Hertford Mercury and Reformer of 1st December 1848 noticed that, at the Hemel Hempstead petty sessions, “Edmund Hearn and John Hearn, two Gypsies, were charged with releasing a horse from the pound”, adding that the case was “adjourned to Berkhamsted, in order to get the attendance of another witness”.

In 1841 concerns were raised about the Gypsies living on the commons near Bow Brickhill in Bedfordshire. Although not in the Chilterns, the following report, from the Bedfordshire archives, part of the Russell Correspondence, addresses this:

“The Boundary of Wandon Heath plantation is a great resort for Gypsies, having Aspley Heath on one side and Bow Brickhill Heath on the other (both commons). We are obliged to keep one, and often times two or three men, to keep watch to prevent depredation, but the plantations suffer more damage from people who have been permitted to build on the heath of both parishes, than from Gypsies - the donkeys can get nothing in the plantation but heath, of which they will not eat much, but the Gypsies put the ling (heath) for besoms and then go to the woods and cut strong poles to make the handles for their besoms. In spite of all our lookout they can and do occasionally make inroads upon their resident neighbours on the heath [and] do not hesitate to steal a fir tree or two occasionally and when that happens, by getting a search warrant and looking over the premises of the worst characters, [it] keeps them in order for a time, but considering the extent of boundary with these two heaths and the sort of lawless people who adjoin them, the damage sustained is less than might be expected”.

The Drapers, Smiths and Loveridges were amongst the Romany and Traveller families that counted the area around Aspley as home territory. Kisby Draper, bearing a first name specific to the tribe, and a Gypsy horse dealer, was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment in Aylesbury gaol in 1859. He names Aspley as his place of birth, and the notes on his prison record remark that he was “of Gypsy appearance”, and also, in the opinion of the writer, “alien to good feelings”. Nevertheless, such events did not seem to trouble the local landowners overmuch as they continued to happily employ the Gypsy community as casual labourers. The 1881 census records a Spencer Draper, 54, living with his wife, Ann, 48, a pedlar, and two sons, Edmund, 25, and Nelson, 22, on Aspley Heath. All three men are employed as agricultural labourers.

However, small scale offences were dealt with severely by the local courts, although it is worth pointing out that most of the poor were dealt with in a similar manner for their many and frequently petty infringements of the law. Often, the crimes committed by the Gypsies and Travellers were specific to their way of life, but Gypsies and the local population alike found themselves in court for crimes such as stealing hay or poaching a rabbit and given harsh sentences for these misdemeanours. What makes the court records of the appearance of Gypsies and Travellers important is not whether they were more or less inclined to criminality than the settled community, but that we can learn important details about them and their way of life.

The local population in the villages adjoining the commons also, like the farmers, depended on the Traveller community who mended pots and kettles, sharpened tools and knives and mended umbrellas. Little boys with their pocket knives and the household scissors would
run after the Gypsy and his grinding machine, and watch the sparks fly from the tiny grindstone, perhaps also buying a paper windmill for a penny. So, if the relationship with the Travelling fraternity was one of wariness, it was also one of inter-dependence.

Many Travellers were accomplished musicians and the village feasts, local fairs, Morris dancing and dancing booths were all events that provided the Gypsy fraternity with the opportunity to make money by playing for the local population. These financial rewards bolstered the casual labouring work, fruit picking, hop picking, pea picking and the summer harvest, as well as apple picking, hawking and brick making, all important occupations for the Traveller population.

As well as providing much of the music and running the dancing booths and shooting galleries, the Gypsies also hawked goods they had made, pegs, lace, shawls, wax flowers or real ones, these last often gathered from the woodland that abutted the commons. In the spring, in particular, the Travellers would gather the flowers growing wild, primroses, bluebells, snowdrops, and later in the year broom and heather, to fashion them into bouquets and bunches to sell. Carpets of such wild flowers were nurtured by the tribes, and the results can still be seen in woodland copses, where the Gypsy families would often return to the same camping spot year after year, and made sure of this source of income.

Woodcote is a lovely example of this and the baptismal records offer evidence of the Gypsy presence:

1878, on 28th July, little Providence Beldam, the daughter of Thomas and Matilda (Talitha), Travellers, is baptised;

1888, on 11th November, William Loveridge, a licensed hawker, and his wife, Elizabeth, baptise a son, John Edward, at Woodcote;

1897, on 19th September, the wonderfully named Pheazenta Fenner, daughter of Cornelius and Caroline, hawker, is baptised at Woodcote;

1911, on 8th January, Gilderoy Buckling (Buckland) son of Henry and Rosina, hawker, is baptised, aged nine months, his parents are “sojourning in Woodcote”;

1911, on 12th March, William and Agnes Smith, also a hawker and also “sojourning in Woodcote”, baptised Victoria along with another sojourner couple, hawker Joseph Doe and his wife Lena, who baptised their daughter Britannia, born 27th January 1911.

The Oxford fairs and feasts drew the Romanies and Travellers to the area, and the commons and heaths provided a perfect location for these events, many of which date back for centuries. Jackson’s Oxford Journal of 10th September 1836 records that:

St. Giles’s fair was this year attended by an unusual number of toy stalls and exhibitions of various descriptions . . . We had a variety of Punch and Judy [shows], sleight of hand, balancing, accompanied by the usual group of Gypsies with snuff boxes.
Jackson’s Oxford Journal of 14th September 1895 reflects, somewhat nostalgically, on the memories of an ancient inhabitant, who remarked that “for many years the west side of St. Giles was occupied by Gypsies, who drove a thriving trade in snuffboxes and jack-in-the-box[although now superseded by coconut stalls and Aunt Sally]”.

Several of Louisa Smith’s sons were musicians, Jonas, Perrin, Josiah, Job and William, and Perrin also ran a dancing booth, so this family were sure to have attended the Oxford fairs and feasts. Their sister Counselette, was the third wife of fiddler Tommy Boswell, who also played for Morris dancers both in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Gypsies would travel to the Oxford fairs, held on the local commons, with their dancing booths, boxing shows and coconut stalls (one of which Tommy also ran) to buy and sell, enjoy a day’s outing or meet up with old friends and even enemies, for these gatherings were not, of course, without their problems.

The commons at Nettlebed in Oxfordshire were another popular stopping place for Travellers in the Chilterns, and continued to be so well into the nineteenth century. In the 1871 census a significant family of Romany Smiths can be found there, living in a “Gypsie tent”.

Two local papers reported on a quarrel at Nettlebed. The Abingdon Herald of 12th October 1868 in colourful language, called it a “Riot at Nettlebed”, but Jackson’s reported, more soberly, in its issue of 10th October 1868:

“Henry Bailey, of Chichester, a Traveller, attending fairs with a rifle gallery, was charged with discharging a rifle at Thomas Stratford, at Nettlebed, on the night of Saturday the 3rd of October. The prisoner, with other Travellers, was journeying from Burnham to Abingdon fair, and stopped at Nettlebed, where a quarrel took place between the villagers and the Travellers, in the melee the rifle was discharged by Bailey, who was taken into custody, and committed for trial at the Assizes”.

But in spite of such disruptions, the communities lived side by side in reasonable, if wary, harmony most of the time, and Nettlebed was a source of income for the Gypsies, and an improved life-style for the settled population. Between Nettlebed and Woodcote Commons were beech woods and these local materials offered a plentiful supply of suitable wood for making and mending chairs, so it is no surprise to find a member of the Holland tribe camping with his family on Nettlebed Common in the 1881 census. Chair-turner William Holland, aged about 41, is with his wife, Mary, and their four sons, William, Walter, Frederick and Samuel, all of whom are recorded as having been born on Nettlebed Common. Chair-bottoming and chair mending were crafts that relied on the materials close to the common land, and the skills required were to be frequently found amongst the Traveller population.

However, it was its bricks and pottery for which Nettlebed was most famous, since it was the major centre for brick, tile and pottery manufacture in Oxfordshire from medieval times. There is still evidence of the old clay workings on the Common from which bricks, tiles, drainage pipes, tobacco jars and flower vases were made up until the 1920s. In his essay The Natural History of Oxfordshire, published in 1677, Robert Plot remarks of Nettlebed brick:
About Nettlebed they make a sort of brick so very strong that whereas at most places they are unloaded by hand, I have seen these shot out of carts after a manner of stone, to mend highways, and yet none of these broke; but this I suppose must be ascribed to the nature of the clay, than to the skill of the artificer in making and burning them.

The Romanies and Travellers therefore had a significant role to play in the local economy, working for farmers and brick makers, as well as hawking necessities, such as pegs, and little luxuries, including lace, wooden toys and paper windmills, and mending the household goods of the local inhabitants. Whatever the general population’s anxiety, there is no doubt that the tribes were important contributors to the social fabric and that the commons provided both a temporary home and the materials to enable them to making a living and contribute to the economic well-being of the community.

Nevertheless, particularly when moving between sites or travelling to fairs and feasts, the Gypsies often found themselves objects of concern, resulting in the frequent court cases relating to Gypsy encampments. The example below, whilst outside the Chilterns, gives a clear picture of events.

The Oxford Times of 2nd May 1868 reported on the trial of three Gypsies, two of Louisa’s sons, Josiah and Job Smith, and a son-in-law, Henry Bath, husband of her daughter Lucy, charged with being found in a lane in the parish of Marcham, without visible means of support:

“The prisoners formed a portion of an encampment of Gypsies who had squatted in the lane in question, and in consequence of many complaints having been made to the police by parties in the neighbourhood of damage to fences and trees, which rightly or wrongly, but most probably the former, had been laid to these marauders. A constable took the three men named into custody on the previous Saturday night amidst a clamour of tongues, profaneness, and lamentations on the part of the women and children, one of the prisoners being found asleep at the time, in a tent, the other two sitting over the remains of what appeared to be a considerable camp fire. They pleaded guilty, but protested they had never been at the place before, and one of them created a laugh by expressing a wish that they could get somewhere where the police were not, or else that they would not interfere with them. The bench committed them for seven days each. There were a large number of bronzed faces in the court, with anxiety expressed on their countenances, and at the close of the case, as the men were rather strongly, one woman shouting out, “They are going to starve you for a week, but you shall have beef enough when you come out”.

Whatever the social anxieties, the truth is that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Gypsy fraternity were an important element of village life; their camps on the commons afforded them opportunities to maintain their way of life, by working with and for the settled community. The village feasts, local fairs, Morris dancing, dancing booths and fairgrounds all provided them with a chance to make money and, as they were camped on the local commons and heaths, this meant that the Gypsies were perfectly situated to do just that. Whilst many of the Gypsies were accomplished musicians, this occupation, of course, was not sufficient to maintain them throughout the year, so the casual work, fruit and hop picking and the summer harvest, as well as hawking and brick making, were jobs which contributed to the common good and the census records indicate the many and varied tasks the Travellers undertook over time.
On Whipsnade Heath, in Bedfordshire, there are still signs of the quarrying that took place, the labour principally supplied by Gypsies, to lift the flint so popular in the area, both for house and church building and decoration, as well as for making roads and paths. Many of the local properties display this occupation in their decorative flint exteriors. In addition, the chalk deposits there led to a considerable amount of lime-burning to supply the farmers thereabouts and beyond.

Whilst nearby Dunstable Downs also boasted large quantities of chalk, it was the large fairs held there on the common land that provided the best source of income for the Romanies and Travellers camped nearby. The smaller village fairs which were within walking distance for the travelling musicians were also an attraction, but over time the village feasts had given way to the larger travelling fairs, and the regular attendance at the smaller events, for local people, and eventually for Gypsies, became less certain.

Although outside the Chilterns, the annual Cardington May, held in Bedfordshire each year, illustrates this decline in the lesser events. The Hertfordshire Mercury and Reformer of 13th June 1840 mentions the significance of the Gypsy population at the event, even as it reflects on the diminishing attendance of the local population:

“This annual feast commenced on Saturday last and the amusement on Monday; and although the thing was carried on with some spirit, yet Cardington May was not as it had been, “the light of other days had faded” with our grandmother’s high heeled shoes and hoops. Still many a fair lass was trotted out by the lad she smiled on, to trip the light fantastic to the sounds produced by the joint efforts of a swarthy Gypsy fiddler, who did all he could to cut his fiddle adunder with the bow, and an old gentleman with his clarinet, who tried all he could to burst his cheeks in his excited endeavours to make his music tell. Nor must the dark-eyed Gypsy lady with a frill of black lace round her bonnet, and black feathers, be forgotten, nor her valuable accompaniment on the tambourine; for be it known she was the most important, inasmuch as her bewitching smile caused more pieces of silver to shower into her tambourine than would have fallen into her companions’ pockets, if they had fiddled and blown till doomsday.”

As travel became easier, and the smaller villages less populated, the larger funfairs were to be found on the common land, with considerable numbers both of the settled population and Travellers attending. In Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire probably one of the most famous fairs was Harris Funfairs.

Moses Harris belonged to a Cambridge-based family, but it was a short trip to Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire where, on the common land, they set up their funfairs, with steam roundabouts and gallopers, during the nineteenth century. Moses's wife, Clara, was the daughter of a travelling showman, Larry Shaw, who was also described as a hawker or a sieve maker in the records of the baptisms of his children. So the union of Moses Harris and Clara Shaw, in the December quarter of 1869, connected two significant Traveller families.

The Harris family baptised many of their children in the home territory of Gamlingay, in Cambridgeshire, but some baptisms and subsequent marriages of their children attest to the travels into Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, presumably for the fairs and feasts, which were their principal means of livelihood. At the Petty Sessions of 27th July 1870, at Royston, Hertfordshire, Clara Harris was charged “with using a steam engine on the turnpike road at Barkway on the day of the fair, so as to cause an obstruction.” For this she was fined 2/6d and 7/6d costs, which were paid. Ken Page in The Story of Harris’s Funfairs, described Clara as a “remarkable woman . . . the daughter of Larry Shaw, a travelling showman of Buntingford, who was reputed to be the first person travelling steam roundabouts. Larry
Shaw was an adept fiddler and also travelled a dancing booth and a likeness show,” adding that “Clara was skilled at driving his roundabout centre engine as early as 1862”.

The 1891 census shows Moses and Clara Harris living at Hitchin Street, Biggleswade, and still heavily involved with the fairground. Moses is described as a travelling steam engine proprietor, and his family are also working in the business. So, too, are the Shaw family.

Larry’s son, Charles, who had married Moses’s sister, Sarah/Sally, ran a shooting gallery and coconut shy, whilst Sally was renowned for her spit rock confection and Clara for her excellent gingerbread, sold at fairs and feasts. Arthur Shaw, Clara’s and Charles’s brother, can also be found in the 1891 census travelling with the Harris steam circus as a photographer, something that was gaining popularity amongst the general public.

Horse-dealing was, of course, another occupation popular amongst the Romany and Traveller population of previous centuries, connected with the commons. The horse fair held on Stokenchurch Common every July, close to the border between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, was very popular, and here, too, local newspapers carry references to Gypsies attending the fair. The *Buckinghamshire Herald* of 24th July 1880 notes that Thomas Beldam, a Gypsy at Stokenchurch fair, was summonsed for allowing three horses to stray.

There were two Thomas Beldams in the family that favoured the Stokenchurch area at this time. The parents of the elder Thomas had been buried at Stokenchurch, his father in 1839, aged 61 years and his mother in 1869, claiming to be 93, which indicates the importance of the location to the immediate family. The elder Thomas and his wife, Mariah Smith, had a large family of at least nine children, many of whom united with significant Gypsies families. Thomas would therefore have been about 78 at the time of the court appearance the newspaper refers to, but perhaps his son, Thomas, is the more likely candidate. The name Thomas appears in this particular family throughout the generations, but the other two Thomas Beldams in 1880 were children: one, the son of Thomas and Talitha, was only seven, baptised at Stokenchurch, Oxfordshire on 10th March 1873.

Another Beldam family name is Frampton; one was the son of Thomas and Maria who died in 1860, but his nephew, also Frampton Beldam, was recorded in the *Buckinghamshire Herald* of 4th January 1896, summoned for allowing a pony and two donkeys to stray on the Ibstone Road, Stokenchurch. The newspaper reference to Frampton Beldam illustrates that the Beldams often over-wintered in the Stokenchurch area.

Stokenchurch Common, amongst many others, was subject to the Parliamentary Enclosure Act. In 1861 part the remaining common was specifically reserved for the Horse Fair which was held on July 10th and 11th each year, but the Gypsies frequently made a temporary home at nearby Naphill Common. The area could always provide work, if it were needed, even in the winter time, as there were brick works at Cadmore End, a few miles down the road, and Stokenchurch was well known for its chair making and mending. The proximity to local woodlands furnished the basic materials and rushes were brought in to provide the seating; the rush-weaving was often done as casual labour by women.
In the villages the frequent appearance of Gypsy women, who were camped on the local commons, selling their baskets of flowers and lace amongst the local population was, just as often, accompanied by an offer to tell a young lady’s fortune. Whilst this was considered a fraudulent, and therefore illegal, activity, there is no doubt that it was popular, especially with the village girls, who crossed the Gypsy’s palm with silver to be told whether they would marry a fair or a dark young man, and how soon that would be.

Although many Travellers continued to prefer their own informal Gypsy wedding ceremony, later in the nineteenth century some Gypsy weddings were held at local churches and began to be described in local newspapers. Funerals, especially those of aged Gypsies of significant tribes, were reported with some affection and sudden deaths treated with more sympathy than earlier in the century. The Hertfordshire Mercury and Reformer of 27th April 1844 wrote a brief article detailing the death of Maria Pearce, who was camped with her tribe on the common near Stotfold, in Bedfordshire:

*It appeared that the deceased, in company with a man named Plato Smith, with whom she had cohabited for the last 20 years, had encamped near Stotfold with others of the Gypsy tribe when she was attacked with an inflammation of the brain. She was removed to the union workhouse Monday evening, and expired.*

Death in the workhouse was not considered an uncommon event for the Romany and Traveller fraternity. The workhouse offered access to some medical treatment and was often considered, in the nineteenth century by a community who frequently experienced a harsh existence, to be appropriate for the aged or the sick, rather than keeping them on the road.

Just two months earlier, Maria and Plato Smith had baptised their daughter, Isabel, at Kensworth, Hertfordshire on 10th February. The births of their children detail a short travelling circuit, which included villages in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Buckinghamshire.

Although the relationship between Romanies and Travellers and the settled community was often tense, it could also be harmonious. Living on the commons meant living side by side with the villagers, and the distance between the two was diminished by the tasks the Gypsies undertook. Fiddle players, in particular, became well known in their locality because of the entertainment they provided, which was perhaps more highly valued than other skills, such as those of umbrella mending, chair bottoming, basket making, agricultural labouring or knife grinding, all of which, however, contributed to the common good. As a result, it is unsurprising to find the Luton Times and Advertiser of 28th May 1870 reporting on the death of a Gypsy fiddler named Draper of Bedfordshire, as one who “would be long remembered locally” and who had been able to bequeath the not insubstantial sum of £205 to his widow and one dozen clothes pegs to an old friend.

As the 20th century ushered in rapid progress in technical development and social change, Gypsies and Travellers also adapted. Most were to become part of the settled population, the young Gypsy men serving in two World Wars, and returning to a very different way of life from that of their ancestors. Since the Gypsy and Traveller families are listed in the Appendix, it might seem that they are separated from the land that they inhabited; that, in the end, their role was an irrelevancy and they were always to be outsiders. But what is key is the important contribution Gypsies and Travellers of the past made to rural life, a past still marked on the common ground of the Chilterns.
Appendix

Fisher Family

Some family details (maps show places in the Chilterns they are associated with)

The witness at Thomas and Sabrah's marriage is especially interesting. She is Thomas Fisher's sister, and the wife of the Gypsy Jeremiah Taylor, whose violent death at the hands of another Traveller, on Wimbledon Common in the spring of 1831, caused considerable, if brief, media interest. Her own death, drowned in the Hartlake disaster, was to be scarcely less tragic; 30 casual labourers who had been hop-picking, mainly Romanies and Travellers, died in an accident on their way back to their campsite in October 1853.

Sarah, together with her brothers Thomas and William Fisher, was more frequently found in Bushey in the county of Hertfordshire, where Sarah and Jeremiah baptised many of their children. During these years Thomas and Sabrah Fisher and William and Hannah Fisher were also baptising offspring, and Jeremiah, Thomas and William were all recorded as basket-makers. William had married Hannah Ensworth in 1816 in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire and they baptised Elizabeth Anne on 13th February 1817 in Bushey, whilst Thomas and Sabrah, also in Bushey, baptised Joseph on 10th December 1815, Isaac and William on 1st November 1821 and Jeremiah on 3rd April 1825, this last presumably in tribute to Sarah's husband. Another son, Thomas, was baptised at St Mary's Church, Watford on 30th May 1819.

Sabrah died, probably sometime between 1825 and 1830, since Thomas Fisher, a widower, married Charlotte Andrews in Hitchin, Hertfordshire on 20th June 1831. Again, he signed, whilst his wife and the witness, Joseph Fisher, made their mark; this Joseph is likely to have been Thomas's son by his first marriage, aged about 16 or 17 by this time. The 1841 census finds the family at Flint Hall, Bushey, with Thomas and William Fisher, Sabrah's sons, and the elder Thomas's family with Charlotte, John, born about 1832, Edward, born the following year, and Sarah, named after Thomas's sister, born about 1835.

Hearn Family

The children of this Thomas Hearn are often to be found in Hertfordshire. His eldest known son, Tinkerfield/Tankerville, married a second wife, Flowery Ayres, in Bovingdon on 4th January 1790 and their eldest known son, Job, was baptised at Bovingdon on 2nd May that same year. A second son of Thomas Hearn's, Montague, baptised a son, William, at Northchurch, Hertfordshire on 19th October 1794 and another son, Charles, baptised at Bovingdon on 27th December 1802, married Mary Ann Drake at Northchurch on 27th October 1821. A third son, Thomas, named after his father, married Frances Smith in Bovingdon on 5th February 1812, with his sister, Elizabeth, and brother-in-law, Joseph Leatherland, as witnesses. Thomas and Mary Ann baptised a son, Meshach, at Harpenden, Hertfordshire on 22nd November 1801 and Meshach was to marry Alice Taylor at Watford, Hertfordshire on 5th January 1825.

The year before Thomas Fisher and Sabrah Swift married, on 17th January 1813, Norris and Abigail Hern (sic) "Travellers or Gypsies" baptised a son, Josiah, who had been born on 8th January that year. Their other known children were Repentance, baptised at
Bovingdon, Hertfordshire on 23rd May 1795; Edmund, baptised at Whipsnade, Bedfordshire on 6th November 1796; Solomon, baptised at Aldbury, Hertfordshire on 9th June 1799; Methuselah, baptised at Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire on 12th September 1802; Norris, baptised at Wigginton, Hertfordshire on 23rd June 1805; Emmanuel, baptised at Tring, Hertfordshire on 6th December 1807; and Selina, baptised at Bovingdon, Hertfordshire on 30th July 1815.

Of course, there were many other Hearsns, members of the same extended family, who had also baptised children at the local church; as early as 16th December 1801, Mullender Hern (sic), a brother of the elder Norris, and his wife Elizabeth baptised their son, Mark, at Hawridge and another child, Margaret, at Ivinghoe, Buckinghamshire on 8th November 1818. Hawridge was where Travellers Emmanuel and Elizabeth Hearn baptised a son, Solomon, in November 1832 and a daughter, Abigail, in 1835. In April 1834 a Frances Leatherland, daughter of Samuel and Charlotte, “Travellers and Gypsies”, had also been baptised at Hawridge. Samuel Leatherland's mother was formerly Elizabeth Hearn, and sister to the Thomas who was Charlotte's father. (Samuel and Charlotte being first cousins, a union that was a common enough practice amongst the Gypsy fraternity.) Samuel's mother, Elizabeth Leatherland, was an especially famous Gypsy, believed to have lived to be 111 years of age, and the Elizabeth married to Emmanuel Hearn was another of her many children.

In the January of 1801 Moses and Sarah Hearn baptised their son, Joseph, at Chesham and at the end of the same year, on 27th December 1801, John and Mary Hearn baptised a son, Moses. By the 31st October 1802 Moses and Sarah Hearn were again baptising another son, this time called John. The Hearsns also married in the area and, on 3rd April 1820, Chesham was the chosen location for the union of Joseph Hearn and Ann Taylor.

Edmund and John were the sons of Solomon Hearn and his wife, Macey (Mercy) Hearn. Solomon had been baptised at Aldbury, Hertfordshire, the son of Norris and Abigail, so was very much a local. His wife, Macey, had been baptised in Sarratt, Hertfordshire on 29th April 1792, the daughter of Rial (Royal) Hearn and Sarah. Of their known children, four were to be baptised in Hertfordshire, John and Edmund being not only brothers, but twins. They were baptised in Bovingdon, Hertfordshire on Christmas Eve in 1826, and Hertfordshire was to remain very much home territory for both of them. A sister, Catherine, was baptised just down the road in Northchurch, Hertfordshire on Christmas Day 1832 and on the same day three years' later, Royal, their last known child was also baptised.

Edmund and John were short travellers, and kept fairly close to home territory, certainly in terms of baptising their children. John formed a union with Mary Ann Green, the daughter of John and Mary Anne, who was herself baptised in the same county, at Bushey, on 28th October 1821. Their known children were: Annie, born in Bushey about 1850; Henry, born about two years' later; George, born in around 1854; Edmund, named after his brother, was baptised at Bushey on 28th March 1858, having been born the previous December; Royal, also named after a brother, was baptised on Christmas Day 1859, having been born on 9th November, the previous month; John was baptised in Bushey on 21st December 1862 and Norris, named after John's grandfather, was baptised in the same location on 25th October 1868.

Edmund's partner, Rebecca, born about 1830, gave birth to Sophia in London in about 1853; Catherine, named after a sister, who was baptised at Shenley, Hertfordshire on Christmas Day 1857; Dorcas, named after an elder sister, was baptised at Watford, Hertfordshire on 10th October 1873, but was about 11 years of age at the time; Edmund, born about 1867, was baptised at the same place and on the same date as Dorcas; John, their last known child, was also baptised with his siblings, probably as a baby.
By the 1881 census these brothers are still living in Hertfordshire: John, a dealer, can be found with his wife, Mary Ann, and youngest son, Norris, at the High Street, Bushey and Edmund, a horse dealer, is with Rebecca and children Dorcas, Edmund and John, as well as his widowed father, Solomon, a cane worker, at Colney Butts Cottage, Watford.

They are recorded as Louisa Smith, a widow, with some of her extended family: Jonas, claiming birth in Berkshire in 1839, but actually baptised at Stanford-in-the-Vale, Oxfordshire in 1832; John, born about 1848; William, born about 1852; James, born about 1849; Sarah, born about 1853 and “Condancias”, born about 1859 (almost certainly her grandson, Andanias, baptised in Oxford in 1857). Louisa had been baptised with her grandmother’s name, Ashi, in Buckland, Berkshire in December 1808, the daughter of “Nepthan”. Her parents were, in fact, Neptune Smith and Elizabeth Ayres, both descended from important Romany families, as was Louisa’s deceased husband, Mark, the son of Arthur and Carnation (Nation) Smith.

Mark Smith, who had died at Nettlebed in the autumn of 1869, had been buried there on 30th October 1869. Together he and Louisa had 13 known children, all but one baptised in Oxfordshire: the previously mentioned Jonas; Lucy, baptised at Ewelme, 22nd April 1827; Arkless, also known as William, baptised at Emmington, 19th April 1829; Phineal, baptised at Lewknor on 27th February 1831; Oliver, baptised at Warborough, 21st December 1834 and K unsaleti/Counseletti Smith (great-great grandmother of the author Anne Ford), who was baptised at Ipsden on 10th January 1837. Louisa’s next child, Perun, also known as Frank, was baptised in Didcot (then in Berkshire), on 12th February 1838; Urania at Ewelme on 6th August 1843, but buried the following month at Aston Tirrold, Berkshire; Victoria (Tiggy) at North Stoke on 27th April 1845, together with her twin brother, Albert; Josiah at Chalgrove 24th August 1847; and the last two known children both at Goring Heath, Job on 1st February 1850 and Adelaide on 24th January 1853.

Maria and Plato Smith had baptised their daughter, Isabel, at Kensworth, Hertfordshire on 10th February 1844. The births of their children detail a short travelling circuit, which included villages in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Buckinghamshire. Their first known child, Neptune, was baptised at Totternhoe, Bedfordshire on Christmas Day 1819, having been born the previous March, indicating the family were probably wintering out on the commons at Totternhoe Castle. A second son, John, was baptised at Eaton Socon, Bedfordshire on 31st March 1822, and James at Lower Winchendon, Buckinghamshire on 1st May 1825. Israel, recorded as the son of Plato and Mary (sic) was baptised at Hitchin, Hertfordshire on 28th December 1830 and a daughter at Rampton, Cambridgeshire on 21st July 1833, followed by Maria, named for her mother, baptised at Stotfold, Bedfordshire on 26th November 1838. The times of year clearly indicate that the family were often to be found on the Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire borders during the winter months.
Welling Family

Lydia Welling died in the June quarter of 1859 in the registration district of Amersham and Francis just three years later. Joseph Welling's death is recorded in the same district in the June quarter of 1866, "aged 37", and by the 1881 census Elijah is found living with his elder brother, Isaac. By 1891 Elijah, too, has disappeared from the records, but Isaac is still to be found in the Chesham area, in the gloriously named Wooden Babylon, as a hawker of toys. Brother Eli, together with his wife, Mary Ann, is also in the parish of Chesham, where he is now the publican of the White Horse, and claiming birth at Lye Green.

Beldam Family

The elder Thomas Beldam was baptised at Kingsey, in Buckinghamshire on 18th June 1802, the son of Thomas and Rice Beldam. The name Rice, unusual and significant, is found in the Hearn family, and Rice Beldam is almost certainly the daughter of Royal and Sarah Hearn.

The name Thomas appears in this particular family throughout the generations, but of the other two Thomas Beldams, one, the son of Thomas and Talitha, was only seven, baptised at Stokenchurch, Oxfordshire on 10th March 1873 and the other, the son of Riley and Leviathan, even younger, having been baptised at Willesden, Middlesex on 10th June 1879. (This last Thomas also married, confusingly, another Talitha, known as Matilda/Tilly, the daughter of Dorcas/Darkus Lee, who was herself the daughter of the previously mentioned Tommy Boswell with his second wife, Emily Lee.) Thomas and Mariah’s son Thomas, the husband of Talitha, would have been about 41 and is probably the Thomas Beldam referred to.

Their eldest daughter Sophia formed a relationship with Ansel Byles; Cinderella with the Kisby Draper mentioned earlier; Martha with Onesphirus Buckland; Mary with Meshach Hearn. Of their sons, Frampton married Sophia Fletcher, daughter of William and Mary; Thomas married Talitha Fenner, daughter of Joseph Fenner and Penelope Buckland; Riley formed a union with Leviathan, daughter of Sidney Hughes and Amy Smith.

Frampton Beldam, the son of Thomas and Mariah, was baptised at Great Hampden, Buckinghamshire on 8th December 1833. However, it would seem that this Frampton’s death is recorded in the September quarter of 1860. His nephew, another Frampton (the name being used by the elder Frampton’s brother, Thomas, for his first son) was baptised at Bearwood, Berkshire on 14th May 1865. Using siblings names, in particular, for their own children was a common practice amongst the Gypsy fraternity.

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From Berkhamsted to Battlefield

WWI training trenches on Berkhamsted Common

Norman Groves

It is, perhaps, easy to forget that when the Great War began in August 1914 it was one of manoeuvre, not trenches and barbed wire. Despite attempts, by both armies, to outflank the other and achieve quick total victory, the ‘race to the sea’ created a situation by November 1914 in which the contending sides faced each other on a front stretching from the Swiss border to the North Sea. Both then used entrenching to get below ground level as quickly as possible to avoid unnecessary casualties.

Small trench systems quickly dug in the first few months of the war grew more sophisticated and more complex, eventually becoming vast areas of interlocking defensive works resistant to artillery bombardment and mass infantry assaults. Aerial photographs taken during the war show just how intricate these trench systems became.

There is a long and varied history of military use of commons in the Chilterns, involving actual battles, military garrisons, transit camps, land for field training and many other activities.

As battle lines in continental Europe continued largely static in nature, the skills to construct trenches and trench systems became of increasing importance. Training facilities sprang up all over England as an important part of wider military training, and the Chilterns were no exception. Examples of still traceable trench systems can be found at Ashridge, on Whiteleaf Hill, at Halton and in Pullingshill Wood on Marlow Common, among others, and a major system of 600m (out of an original 12 kilometres or so) can be found on Berkhamsted Common.

In 1914, the Chilterns town of Berkhamsted was a much smaller and sleepier settlement than now. Within months it swelled to a bustling garrison, with up to 2,500 soldiers (adding about 30% to the town's population), as it became the wartime home of the Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps (OTC) for five years from 1914 to 1919.

The Inns of Court regiment, with an illustrious history since the Spanish Armada to today, proudly carry the nickname ‘The Devil’s Own’. It was George III who, after many spats with the legal profession, and having asked the origin of the troops he was inspecting, exclaimed “What? All lawyers? Call them the Devil’s Own!!”

Berkhamsted and nearby villages soon felt the devastating double tragedy from the insanity of this “Great” war, with a shocking number of casualties from amongst this visitor regiment and also amongst the many local men and boys who left home to join Kitchener’s Army.
Of the nearly 12,000 officers trained by the Inns of Court OTC, up to 7,000 were killed or wounded. Nearly 2,200 died - for them, Berkhamsted was their last 'home' in England. Their war memorial is on the Common. Three members of the Corps were subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross. Many other honours were awarded, including some by foreign governments.

When war broke out in 1914 the Inns of Court OTC, with their headquarters in Lincoln's Inn, central London, needed an accessible base in the countryside to carry out field training and other training exercises with rapidly expanding numbers of trainees, including a cavalry squadron. Berkhamsted had a railway station and Lord Brownlow offered land on his adjoining Ashridge Estate. The Corps came for six weeks, but ended up staying permanently until 1919.

A vast tented camp grew up along the valley, with 300+ tents. Many men were also billeted with local families. Kitchens, stores, lecture rooms, messes, stables and other necessities took over many buildings throughout Berkhamsted and the station saw constant comings and goings, as did the pubs. Farms and villages for many miles around became surrogate front lines, territory to practise raiding, night exercises, equipment, and trench construction.

The Corps's role was to give suitable recruits (they only accepted about 1 in 10 who applied) an intensive three months' grounding in leadership and military skills. There was a constant throughput of new men, a training 'factory', before trainees were commissioned into other fighting regiments.

Trench construction practice was just one way they used the local commons, both Berkhamsted and Northchurch.
Equally important were day field exercises, night-time "night ops" exercises, rifle, gas and bomb ranges and other activities.

King George V visited the training camp on 1st August 1916. Famously, the whole 2000+ Corps lined the country roads to cheer the King away, but somebody had already removed the special road signs and the chauffeur went the wrong way, leaving the disappointed hordes waiting ... and waiting.

Memories of the Inns of Court and their impact on the Chilterns are being revived through talks and articles, assisted by an excellent photographic record, and by a fascinating 1922 book edited by the Corps’s Commanding Officer to 1916, Lt Col Francis Errington. The book records how much the Corps loved their five years around Berkhamsted; how good the land was for training; and how much they felt welcomed during what were traumatic times. A flavour of the times can be gained from extracts from his book.

The Corps first arrived in Berkhamsted in September 1914:

"The day came round and the Corps duly proceeded in an atmosphere of suppressed excitement, to the friendly Hertfordshire town, which was to be our home for so long. On detraining, the infantry made their way into Camp in the field adjoining the Station, and the (Cavalry) Squadron, with sturdy independence, headed in the reverse direction and were soon halted in Water Lane, outside a massive pair of gates which screened the entrance yard of the Old Brewery - of blessed and glorious memory."

Snow and rain were all part of the many field and night exercises.

King George V, second from right with a stick, visited the Inns of Court OTC in August 1916. The Corps’ Commanding Officer Lt-Col Errington is on the extreme right.

A few of the cavalry Squadron passing Berkhamsted Station.

Relaxing in the camp. Sports and the YMCA hut were also popular, plus the pubs, churches, the band, concerts and the Christmas revue. Some of the Corps produced their own humorous publications.
Errington found that the countryside in the Chilterns was just what they needed.

“The surrounding country was the best imaginable for training, so varied, that during my period of command, although we had a battalion tactical exercise first twice, and then once every week, we never had to repeat the same exercise.

To the north lay the big common, later intersected by some 13,000 yards of trenches, then Ashridge Park, undulating and beautifully timbered, placed entirely at our disposal by Lord Brownlow.

To the south, hilly and enclosed land leading to Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons.

To the east, farms and enclosures admirably adapted for night operations; and to the west the private grounds of Rossway and Champneys, always open to us, and woods and farms and enclosures to and beyond Tring.

We went where we liked, and did what we liked.

For the squadron, long treks without touching a road, wide movements, distant reconnaissance; for the infantry, wood fighting, canal crossings, river crossings, big fights on the open commons and downs, local fighting among the enclosures, every form of open training was available”.

“In the neighbouring villages of Nettleden, Little Gaddesden, Aldbury, Ashley Green, Bovingdon, the awakened villager turned to sleep again with greater security when he realised that the outburst of firing, and the swift rush of feet through the village street, betokened nothing more than a night raid of the Devil’s Own!”

“We made a host of friends in and around Berkhamsted, among them Mr Newman, the ubiquitous and indefatigable photographer; Mr Bunker, of Northchurch Farm, who helped us in many ways; Mr Rawle, who ran the Staghounds; Mr Wingfield, the saddler; Mr Gubbins, the friendly proprietor of the “Crown” where we had our Squadron Room for lectures and sing-songs; Mr Blincowe, the helpful Stationmaster; and Mr Pike, our landlord at the Old Brewery. The hospitality of the inhabitants generally is too well remembered to need any word here.”

During the war, the Corps had to overcome considerable difficulties, particularly shortages of uniforms, ammunition, food, accommodation and billets. There were also serious differences with the War Office over the type of men they should be recruiting, with the War Office accused by Lt-Col Errington of summarily wanting people from “particular schools, occupations and in some cases parentage” and being less interested in a candidate’s military knowledge.
In his book, Lt-Col Errington is clearly in favour of recruiting and training men who expressed their individual initiative, self-reliance and strength of character. The War Office's priorities (in Errington's view) was to recruit and train men under the Sandhurst method, repressing individuality and stressing strict discipline. These disagreements took place during the build up to the crucial series of battles now known as The Somme, when more than 20,000 Allied soldiers died on the first day.

The following extract illustrates this political argument, which would eventually lead to Errington's posting to another command, in France.

“We were told to ascertain how many men would be ready to take artillery commissions, and 178 gave in their names. Two officers from the War Office came down to interview them, and rejected the greater number, not only for artillery commissions, but as being fit for commissions at all, and we were ordered to transfer the rejected men as privates to other units. The whole proceeding had taken under five hours, being at the rate of about one and a half minutes per man. The questions asked had, as before, nothing to do with their military requirements, but, as before, referred to their schools, occupation, and in some cases parentage. . . . Many had already been selected by Commanding Officers. . . . A storm of protest from their relatives naturally followed. . . . Questions were asked in the House [of Commons].”

But as far as Errington was concerned, Berkhamsted and the Chilterns were the most satisfactory places to prepare men for the horrors abroad.

“There are few parts of the country in a six-mile radius round Berkhamsted which the Inns of Court have not fought over. From Chipperfield to the Beacon, from Gaddesden Row and the Golden Parsonage, to Cholesbury and the Danish Camp, all the farms and villages are household words; and Potten End, Little Gaddesden, Nettleden, Hawridge, Haresfoot and Bourne Gutter are the Ypres, Arras, Cambrai and the Somme. Never before in England can the armed forces of the Crown have been so free to utilise the whole of a tract of country; and if fences sometimes got broken, if gates were sometimes left open, if somebody's goat was attacked by one of the many dogs which attached themselves, with touching devotion, to the Corps' operations, it will not be denied that the country got full value for it on the fields of France and Palestine.”

A large and growing selection of contemporary black and white photographs is available about the Inns of Court OTC in WWI. Two local commercial photographers in particular took many images for postcards—James Newman, and Watford Fine Arts. Postcards were the email and Twitter of their time and many thousands were sent.
The terrible cost

It is crucial always to remember that this time in Britain’s history is mainly one of tragedy, with numbers of young men killed and terribly wounded at a grotesque level. Of the 12,000 or so young men who passed through the Inns of Court OTC training camp at Berkhamsted and who went on to be commissioned, it is recorded that about 2,200 lost their lives, and a further 3,000 - 5,000 were maimed, many of them very seriously. The fighting life of subaltern officers on the Western Front was often tragically short, as this level of officer was expected to be first out of the trenches in attacks. For many of the trainees their few months in Berkhamsted were their last experience of ‘normality’ before the horrors to come.

The Inns of Court OTC was a visiting regiment, formed from men from across the UK and beyond. In addition, it should not be forgotten that Berkhamsted and all the other parishes in the Chilterns lost unbelievable numbers of local people who volunteered for (or later were conscripted into) Kitchener’s New Army or other services. There are war memorials in every town and village with long lists of names.

Although the Inns of Court OTC headquarters were in London, because Berkhamsted was so important for them, they wanted their war memorial placed on the Common. The regiment never forget their 2,200 fallen who had trained on this land.

The memorial soon after dedication in the early 1920's.

The memorial on 26th July 2014 when the 68 (Inns of Court and City Yeomanry) Signal Squadron and the Inns of Court and City Yeomanry Association held their centenary remembrance parade.

Our Common Heritage From Berkhamsted to Battlefield
Today, the Devil’s Own is a Territorial Army signal squadron within a regrouped Inns of Court and City Yeomanry. It still has the same headquarters in Lincoln’s Inn. Over the winter of 2012/3 some of these soldiers helped the Berkhamsted Trench Mapping Project, detailed in the Appendices that follow.

The information board at the trenches site installed by the Chilterns Conservation Board in the summer of 2014, 100 years after the Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps came to Berkhamsted.
The Trench Mapping Project
A Personal Story

Military use of commons in the Chilterns has a long and varied history involving actual battles, military bases, land for field training and more. Mapping the last visible World War One practice trenches on Berkhamsted Common was chosen by the Chilterns Conservation Board’s Commons Project to reflect these uses because:

- the military use was very extensive - over 7.5 miles of practice trenches were originally constructed between 1914 and 1918, by one regiment;
- the remaining 600m of trenches or so visible on the surface, because they were not backfilled, have never been mapped and have lain in impenetrable undergrowth, largely forgotten for many years, even by local people;
- the Mapping Project tied in with national plans to mark the centenary of WWI, the “Great War” of the 20th century.

First steps
No project of this type can just be ‘launched into’; it needs thought and planning. What follows is a breakdown of what we did and what was required to fulfil our objectives. For those following in our footsteps and wanting to carry out a similar exercise, we hope that this ‘personal view’ provides good advice on what to do.

Project brief
This was prepared early on, and then updated. It set out the project aims; outputs and outcomes sought; research and information needs; personnel, advisers and stakeholders; anticipated preparatory actions prior to fieldwork; personnel needs, fieldwork management; technical methodology proposals; equipment lists; team technical roles and anticipated post-fieldwork activity.

The brief was useful as a tool to consult with advisers, experts and other key organisations. For example, the Berkhamsted and District Archaeology Society provided useful guidance on managing project activities, and other issues.

Risk assessment
This was essential so that volunteers could be adequately advised. Examples from other Chilterns Conservation Board activities were used as a base, and then tailored for the trench site by a Chiltern Society member who had experience of writing such documents. Much is common sense, and the absence of an expert should not stop you thinking of the issues. Apart from the usual trip and falling dangers on an uneven site, large deer herds passing through the bracken growing over the trenches posed the risk of ticks for the mapping project.

Insurance
This needs to be considered early on. Volunteers on this project were covered by the Chilterns Conservation Board’s policy.

Consulting and working with other stakeholders
A number of key stakeholders needed to be consulted:

- The landowner - The Berkhamsted Golf Club Trustee Company which owns the area of the common containing the trenches. They have to balance the needs of their golfing members with the recreation and other interests of the general public.
- Jonathan Hunn, a professional archaeologist who has undertaken research for the National Trust, owners of the Ashridge Estate which adjoins the Golf Club land.
- Berkhamsted and District Archaeology Society, who have experience in planning and executing volunteer-based surveys and fieldwork.
- Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society, who have undertaken research and reporting of activities related to the Commons and of WWI era events.
Dacorum Heritage Trust, who have similarly reported, and hold photographic and written material.

- Inns of Court & City Yeomanry Museum, which is the main repository of material about the Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps.
- Archaeology in Marlow – in 2005 they mapped WWI troop training trenches in Pullingshill Wood, Marlow. They demonstrated their methodology to the Berkhamsted team and provided a written guide. The surveying techniques used at Berkhamsted largely followed the Marlow model, with a few changes to suit local conditions.

The volunteer team

An early task for the Chilterns Conservation Board was to recruit a Project Co-ordinator. I had recently retired, had some spare time, wanted to get more involved with local history and archaeology matters, and lived locally. I also owned a van – not essential to move tools and wheelbarrows around, but very useful.

Involvement in Chiltern Society conservation work parties helped in the process of finding further volunteers, and was useful for borrowing tools.

An absolutely essential task was to identify a pool of able-bodied volunteers, who were willing to work on rough ground in the cold of winter (when conditions were best, as the extensive bracken would have died back, and before birds start nesting). Local history and archaeology societies were fully committed on other projects, and thus volunteers had to be specifically recruited.

Recruitment was carried out by:
- flyers and articles in the Chilterns Conservation Board and Chiltern Society magazines, and letters to the local newspaper;
- talking to fellow volunteers at Chiltern Society conservation work parties based at Wendover Woods and Chesham;
- organising an introductory meeting at a local pub in September 2012, at which 20+ interested people signed up.

The volunteers were entered onto a database, and contacted mainly by email. Of the 50 people who made enquiries, about 35 became active contributors. Dates of clearance and mapping work parties were mainly on Wednesdays and Saturdays so volunteers free on weekdays and those only free at weekends could all take part. Volunteers were asked to confirm their availability for the chosen fieldwork days, teams were formed for each day, and volunteers notified of their team and work dates.

Every effort was made to ensure all volunteers felt included, so some keen volunteers had to be asked to restrict the number of days they contributed. Reminder emails were sent out to each volunteer a week or so before each fieldwork day, to ensure everything would run as smoothly as possible and last minute panics avoided. The logistical load was thus quite heavy, but it ensured there were always sufficient team members to be productive.

While recruiting volunteers it was also seen as essential to seek two or three to become Core Team members. These volunteers understood the clearance and mapping techniques, and were thus able to deputise and lead parts of the operations. Having these knowledgeable volunteers, who actually came along more often than others, made the whole process speedier and more reliable.

A work party smiling because…. it is time to go home!
Preparing the site

The trench site location was in scrub 100 metres west of the golf course fairways, and sloping gently down east to west. The undergrowth was so dense - mainly of frighteningly twisted thorn scrub and briars, with thick patches of high bracken - that most walkers, on the bridleway/footpath that runs north to south through the site, remained unaware that there were any trenches there at all. Thus very substantial clearance and debris removal was essential so that tape measures, for the mapping part of the exercise, could be deployed.

We prepared the site in the autumn and winter, to avoid disturbing any breeding birds. It was essential that most the clearance was burned as it would have been impossible to survey around large piles of cuttings. Locating these bonfires as far as possible away from public (and horse-riding) routes, and away from sensitive grassland, was important. Before the day of a bonfire, the local Rescue Service was contacted, to avoid false call-outs if an un-informed member of the public reported a fire. Bonfires have to be carefully sited (and watched) to prevent them getting out of control. This is even more important in summer when bracken and overhead trees can be very combustible. The ash from a very large bonfire can remain dangerously hot for a couple of days, certainly overnight, and a pile that looks grey and benign can be searingly hot below the surface. Thus warning of bonfires is essential by surrounding with hazard tape, as children (and adults) can easily approach too close. In addition, raking out will help the fire burn out quicker.

The mapping part of the exercise needed to be completed during the six months from October 2012 to March 2013, allowing one contingency month (April) before vegetation regrowth could start to get problematic for surveying. At the beginning, it was impossible to calculate how many clearance work sessions and person-hours would be needed, so the programme had to be constantly managed and adjusted to stay ahead of the mapping work parties.

In the end, sufficient undergrowth was cleared during nine clearance sessions, of which seven were tackled with 7-10 volunteers working 10am to 2pm. In addition the programme started with a full day session when the project was assisted by 20 Cadets from RAF Halton, and in early 2013 about 15 soldiers from the 68 Signal Squadron (the current version of the Inns of Court OTC) helped at another full day session.

On several days, clearance and mapping were managed at the same time, to achieve the most efficient progress.

Tools for clearance

For clearance work, the most useful tools were bow saws and large loppers.

A wheelbarrow was useful for moving large quantities of tools; hazard tape was used to surround and warn of bonfires. All-weather work clothing and tough gloves were left to volunteers to supply, though protective goggles were made available.

A full first-aid kit was taken on all work parties; the work party co-ordinator (and sometimes others) had been on first aid training courses. At the start of every day, and based on the Risk Assessment, a risks and hazards talk was given to inform all participants.
When the 68 Signal Squadron visited, a licensed chain saw operator came along and proved invaluable, cutting up large trunks so these could be carried off the mapping area.

For bonfires, dry kindling, newspapers, and firelighters were necessary. No accelerants, such as petrol, were used. The bonfires were kept small until well established, and not overloaded too soon. When lighting bonfires, it helps to line up the wood in the direction of the wind as this maximises oxygen throughput. If you can borrow them, large rakes and pitchforks are very useful to load and turn the pile. Finally, don’t forget the matches.

**Mapping programme**

It goes almost without saying that suitable scale maps of the site were essential. These were largely available through the local library.

The mapping activity was less physically challenging than clearance, but involved much more standing around in the cold. Thus, while clearance continued throughout the coldest months, the surveying was planned to avoid December to February.

Based on Archaeology in Marlow’s experience, we estimated the number of surveying sessions that would be needed, using six to eight person survey teams. The smallest practical sized team would have been four people. Six people allows more efficient working, and eight means the next 20m x 20m square can be concurrently readied for mapping. Archaeology in Marlow managed to survey four 20m x 20m squares on each 10am to 2pm working session. On average, this work rate was also achieved at the Berkhamsted site.

By plunging through the dense undergrowth to find the trenches, and by roughly plotting these on a 1:1250 scale map, it was calculated that there were about forty 20m x 20m squares containing evidence of trenches, and thus these could probably be surveyed (once the land was cleared) in ten or eleven work sessions. Indeed, the final number of survey sessions needed was ten.

In addition, extra days were needed to construct the baseline markers, install these markers in the ground, and various other tasks.

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Detailed mapping techniques
A typical trench surveying programme can be summarised as:

1. Mark out a straight baseline through the target site so that 20m x 20m squares can be "hung off" and progressively pegged out over time to cover the whole site. The Berkhamsted baseline measured 200m, and mainly followed the line of the north - south bridleway. A marker was sunk in the ground every 20m, ie 11 markers in total. When the marker was on the actual compacted gravel surface of the path, tent pegs with metal washers were used so that minimal damage was caused to the path. Off the path, where the surface was earth, specially made semi-permanent markers were made from 2 litre water bottles filled with concrete, with a large iron bolt in the top (to allow, in extremis, the marker to be found with a metal detector). These latter markers ensured the baseline remained in existence throughout the mapping.

2. Working off the baseline, and using tape measures and the triangulation method to form perfect right-angles (or using an optical square), exact 20m x 20m squares were identified, and marked on site using corner markers (small white plastic discs held down with tent pegs). These were left in place throughout the mapping programme. When it was a particular square's turn to be surveyed, a ranging pole was put at each corner, and tape measures (or nylon cables, with colour coded marks at 1m intervals), stretched down two sides.

3. Going north to south across each square, and using a further tape measure, readings were taken in 1m intervals. Where the measuring tape used for this crossed a trench wall, measurements were entered in the Recording Sheet for that specific square and slice. In addition, a visual record was also kept on the Recording Sheet for each square, to assist the eventual marrying up of all the sheets. Before the kit was moved on to another square, it was important that the layout was checked with adjacent squares (where completed), and anomalies corrected, so that each sheet would seamlessly slot together.

4. In some cases on the site edges, the trench system only covered a small area, and it was unnecessary to clear the whole 20m x 20m square, but only, perhaps, 20m x 4m. As long as this was recorded and drawn correctly on the Recording Sheet, this proved adequate and avoided wasting time with unnecessary clearance.

5. In some places, the trenches are up to about 2.5m deep, and in other places nearer 1m or 1.5m. In most cases, considerable natural erosion and infilling has taken place, leading to trench walls sloping rather than being vertical. The question thus arose - where to put the measuring pole to record where the trench wall used to be? We followed Archaeology in Marlow's tested method and used a visually identified point that, if looking vertically down, approximated to the half-way point down the slope. This seemed to work successfully.

6. The Recording Sheet for each 20m x 20m square included space for subsidiary information about GPS locations, location of photographs etc. These eventually proved more "nice to know", rather than "need to know". What was essential for each sheet (apart from the unique drawn layout and measurements) was a foolproof and logical numbering system; the date when surveyed; a list of the volunteers involved (to help check any later issues) and important instructions (such as all readings MUST be made north to south).

7. Once all the fieldwork was complete, it was then necessary to amalgamate all 36 squares into one map. The raw data, with each square measuring 20cm x 20cm, would make a map about 2m x 1.6m - much too large for general use. Thus, each square was traced onto tracing paper to produce a "clean" version that married up to all adjoining squares. Then copies of the traced versions were made on a photocopier and the images progressively reduced until an A3 sized map was achieved.
Mapping equipment

Much of the mapping equipment needed can be purchased from DIY shops, or from specialist on-line survey equipment companies, or can be home-made. Our equipment included:

- three 30m and one 100m tape measures (all with the markings on one side only, as two sided causes confusion)
- tent pegs and mallet
- concrete baseline markers made from 2 litre water bottles
- corner markers made out of cut up 2 litre milk bottles, and marked “Survey - Do Not Move”
- an optical square for calculating exact angles, especially useful on rough ground
- minimum of 5 ranging poles or very strong bamboo canes, for marking corners
- customised recording sheets (sufficient for the estimated number of squares + spares)
- a Weatherwriter (which is a rain protected A3 clipboard)
- a pad of graph paper for designing and producing copies of the recording sheets
- a camera
- a GPS is not pinpoint accurate, but can be useful to help different people find corner or baseline markers on larger sites, but is unnecessary on smaller sites
- a compass is useful.

A key aim of the Project is to disseminate project findings and further research through articles, exhibitions, talks, posters, etc, and for this a good visual record of project activities is very valuable. It was therefore important to ensure that quality, high resolution photographs were taken, generally of work-parties and at other key events. While focussed on surveying and other logistics it is easy to forget the usefulness, at a later date, of having these images. If suitable skills are not available within the survey team, asking a keen local photographer can be productive. The Chilterns Conservation Board arranged for a skilled, local, amateur photographer, Colin Drake, to visit the project on many occasions, and thus an excellent range of images was achieved.

The project findings

The central task of the project was to record the layout of the remaining 600m of surface-visible trenches on Berkhamsted Common and to add this to a large and growing body of information about the pivotal WWI four years for Berkhamsted and the Chilterns.

These fieldwork findings, together with a lot more documentary and photographic evidence gathered on the Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps’ residence in Berkhamsted, have enabled us to more fully understand and share the impact of the War and training on both the troops, on the town itself, and the Chilterns countryside.

Once mapped, two experts were consulted on the recorded layout of the trenches. The view of Martin Brown, who used to work for the Ministry of Defence, and advised Archaeology in Marlow on their trenches was:

“Looking at the plan, you have a developed three-line system with the front line to the north. The appearance is consistent with the 1915 onwards dates and may show re-use and adaptation over time, with the traverses and junctions looking slightly unusual.”

Richard Osgood, Senior Archaeologist, Conservation, Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Ministry of Defence wrote:

“What you seem to have appears to be a set for generic rather than mission-specific training trenches. Your set is composed of a front line with what look to be ‘island traverses’ which are supported by a pair of ‘communication trenches’. The small T-shaped elements running from the right communication trench may be bombing pits, dugouts, or even latrine areas.”
Appendix 2  Acknowledgements

To carry out an exercise as complicated and as time consuming as the Trench Mapping Project involves many individuals to whom we offer our sincere thanks.

- Norman Groves - Project coordinator
- Peter Johnston, Richard Shepherd, Brian Shepherd - the Project’s Core Team
- 35+ volunteers who regularly turned out even in the worst of weather
- 20 Cadets from RAF Halton
- 15 reservists from 68 Signal Squadron (Inns of Court & City Yeomanry)
- Alex Thompson and Richard North, who have freely shared their excellent IOCTC photographic collections
- Colin Drake, our photographer
- Jonathan Hunn
- Martin Brown and Richard Osgood

Many organisations were particularly generous with their help:

- Archaeology in Marlow
- Berkhamsted Golf Club Trustees
- Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society
- Berkhamsted & District Archaeology Society
- Chiltern Society
- Chilterns Conservation Board
- Dacorum Heritage Trust
- Hertfordshire Countryside Management Services
- The Inns of Court & City Yeomanry Museum

Help with scrub bashing from cadets from RAF Halton. Later on troops from the 68 Signal Squadron contributed as well.
Further resources

Reading
“The Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps During the Great War”, edited by Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Errington, available as free download from the California Digital Library.

“The Devil’s Own Time”, reprint from original, published by Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society, and available from Jenny Sherwood, 01442 865158.

“Commons’ secret is revealed” article in Chilternsaetna, the archaeology and history newsletter of the Chilterns Conservation Board, Issue 6, January 2013.

“Berkhamsted’s WWI Double Tragedy” article in Your Berkhamsted, the magazine of St Peter’s, October 2013.

“Berkhamsted - Home to the Devil’s Own” article in The Chronicle, the journal of the Berkhamsted and District Local History and Museum Society, Volume XI, March 2014.

“Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps - “The Devil’s Own” article in the Gaddesden Diary, Spring 2014.

“Berkhamsted remembers its WWI trainees” article in Chilternsaetna, the archaeology and history newsletter of the Chilterns Conservation Board, Issue 8, Summer 2014.


The “James Newman” Album of excellent photographic images featuring the Inns of Court OTC in WWI is in the care of the Inns of Court & City Yeomanry Museum in London.

Audio Trail No2
This audio trail, researched by Brian Shepherd, covers the WWI Trenches and the Alpine Meadow. A descriptive leaflet is available from Berkhamsted library and Berkhamsted Civic Centre, or online - www.berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk

Songs
Concerts and revues, prepared and staged by the troops themselves, were an important relaxant for the trainees, and we are fortunate that some of the programmes, words and songs survive in the Dacorum Heritage Trust archive. In particular, the programme and songs are available for the 1915 Christmas Revue.

Film
“A County at War: Life on the Home Front in Hertfordshire”. Commissioned by the Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire. Produced by The University of Hertfordshire. Copies of the DVD can be purchased - www.lord-lieutenant-herts.org.uk/elizabethcross/ww1dvd

Websites
Searching for “Inns of Court Officers’ Training Corps, in Berkhamsted, World War One” will bring up various sources, including:
Chilterns Conservation Board - www.chilternsaonb.org
Inns of Court & City Yeomanry - www.iccy.org.uk
Dacorum Heritage Trust - www.dacorumheritage.org.uk
Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society - www.berkhamsted-castle.org.uk
There are around 200 commons in the Chilterns, covering over 2000 hectares and ranging from strips of grass verge to rolling hectares of wildflower-rich grassland and woodland. They play a valuable role in the natural and cultural heritage of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

There is more information about commons in the Chilterns online at www.chilternsaonb.org/commons

See the interactive map to find your nearest common, or contact the Chilterns Conservation Board on 01844 355500 or The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor, Oxfordshire, OX39 4HA.