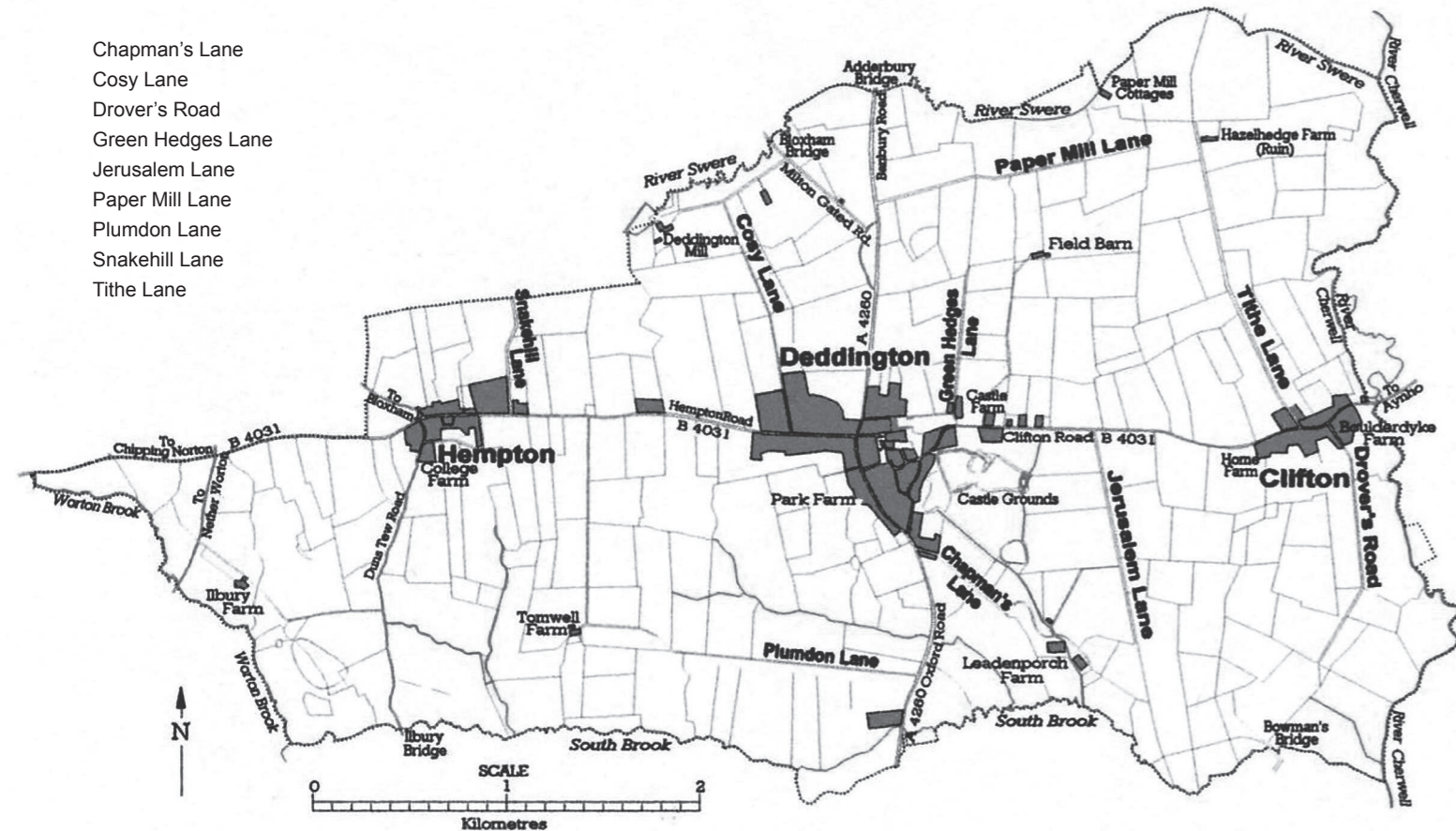


Chapman's Lane
 Cosy Lane
 Drover's Road
 Green Hedges Lane
 Jerusalem Lane
 Paper Mill Lane
 Plumdon Lane
 Snakehill Lane
 Tithe Lane

THE HISTORIC GREEN LANES OF DEDDINGTON PARISH



Walter L. Meagher



The Nine Historic Green Lanes of Deddington Parish

ONE DAY, Ronald Canning (1924-2006) said to me, ‘My great grandfather and his son drove five cows to the byre and twenty sheep to pasture down this lane.’ ‘This lane’ was New Street, the A4260, the village thoroughfare, the main highway connecting Banbury to Oxford. For Ron, ‘lane’ didn’t have pastoral overtones, but for Cobbett it did: ‘In one place I rode above a mile completely arched over by boughs of the underwood, growing in the banks of the lane. What an odd taste that man must have who prefers a turnpike road to a lane like this.’¹

Deddington parish has one paved and eight unpaved lanes. Because they are old, and have wildflowers, hedges and trees, I call them historic green lanes. Lanes were pathways to work – to the quarry on Home Farm, to the mill on Adderbury Grounds Farm; they were drovers’ roads for moving cattle to market, on Drover’s Road and Plumdon Lane. In our day, they are amenity features of the parish, but for the farmer they are conduits for the passage of John Deere on the way to sow and harvest barley, winter wheat and oilseed rape. Etched in the landscape and edged by hawthorn and oak, lanes are inscriptions from a history without words.

A lane is ‘a narrow path or road between hedges, banks, etc.; a narrow road or street between houses or walls.’² In Deddington village, two paved roadways bear the name ‘lane’: Earl’s Lane, bordered by hedges, and Hopcraft Lane, bordered by houses; both are paved and open to motor vehicle traffic. Tays Gateway is a lane in all but name. The Tchure, while not narrow, is an enclosed path between houses, connecting New Street to the Market Square, and offers a striking view of the parish church. The only ‘lane’, in the formal sense of the word, is The Stile, connecting New Street to Philcote Street. Narrow

and enclosed, The Stile would be chosen, with The Tchure, for a scene in a period play.

The best-preserved lane is the Drover's Road on Home Farm; the hedges of one side are matched in height and breadth by those of the other. In the 19th century, it was called Clifton Meadow Road. Once Plumdon Lane was a drove road too. Snakehill Lane, where the hedges are neither high nor wide, was called Blacking Drove Road in 1808.

Cosy Lane, formerly called Mill Road, was a way to Deddington Mill. As early as 1086, Deddington parish had three mills, two on the River Swere and one on the River Cherwell. The parish had two quarries.

Jerusalem Lane, once called Tate Hills Road, led to a Roman quarry in the field called Tatles Pits. Paper Mill Lane was called Church Pits Road. The quarry it served was in a field, Church Pits, west of the head of the lane. Stone quarried there was taken to rebuild the church tower of St Peter and St Paul in the late 17th century.

Parish lanes are generally short: the longest (Drover's Road) is 1.66 km; all are straight rather than winding. Only Chapman's Lane has a right angle bend. Plumdon Lane lies on a ridge for its full length. Cosy and Snakehill Lanes descend on the breast of land falling to the River Swere. Hedges of the parish lanes vary in woody plant richness from the least (Snakehill) to the most (Plumdon) rich, and it is in this order individual green lanes are visited. The number and kinds of trees, the character of hedges, and the wildflowers beneath them, determine the nature and condition of lanes, which is why, as hedgehogs, birds and insects will know, we pay close attention to plant life.

Ornithologists share the view that bird life is better if hedges are tall and overgrown – better for nesting, feeding, and concealment. A hedge cut before fruits mature reduces the year's food supply; a hedge cut without regard to the best practice for regeneration of vegetative growth reduces nesting sites. On the other hand, in Queen Anne's reign (1702-14), in lowland Scotland, 'Quickset hedges were hardly anywhere to be seen, and the want of them was not

regretted, for it was believed that they harboured birds which would eat the corn.’³

Most hedges in the parish are low in height (1-1.5 m), and mostly without lengths of tall trees; consequently the domain of hedges ‘good for birds’ is small. In 1996, the Banbury Ornithological Society (BOS) surveyed Deddington parish hedges to determine which were good for birds. On their evaluation, Chapman’s, Cosy, Green Hedges, Jerusalem, Snakehill, Tithe and the Drover’s Road – all sparse in trees – were rated poor for birds. Paper Mill and Plumdon Lanes were rated good because they are continuously wooded for some distance. Our survey shows that a lane poor in terms set by the BOS may still provide satisfaction to some birds. For instance, yellowhammers make the greatest use of hedges that are stout and medium in height, dense and compact, but not tall and wooded.

Bird life on Leadenporch Farm was studied by Tony Morris for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). A survey conducted in 1997 showed that hedges that are tall and overgrown but open are

less useful for nesting sites than those which are dense and compact, even if those hedges are not tall and densely wooded. ‘Yellowhammer territory density was significantly higher on fields with hedges and/or ditches than on boundaries that consisted of tree-lines (often overgrown hedgerows) or isolated bushes.’⁴ Tall open hedges are sites where predation of eggs and nestlings by magpies is significantly greater than in low, dense, compact hedges.

Good hedges, like a good cuirass, resist penetration; for cattle, the best hedges are impenetrable. These are medium-high (1.2-2 m) and about 1.5-2 m wide. There are no gaps, no openings for elder to root and spread wide its weak branches, as there are in degraded hedges. In strong hedges, hawthorn and blackthorn shrubs touch and interlock, each with its own kind, forming a defensive perimeter to farm boundaries and fields. Ivy may cover the ground storey in shady interiors, while at the base of some good hedges, lords-and-ladies flower and flourish. But lords-and-ladies are not common in the parish. In degraded hedges, spaces open to sunlight are often dominated by nettle.

The three most commonly occurring shrubs in parish hedges – blackthorn, elder and hawthorn – can grow into small trees forming wooded edges. The most common of these, by far, is common hawthorn – ‘hawthorn’ for short. With the growth of shrubs to the height of small trees, wide spaces arise between them, making way for the arrival of other species. Apple, dogwood, pear and wayfaring-tree all settle into gaps more easily than into tightly-knitted hedges. Of the nine lanes, only two, Paper Mill Lane and Plumdon Lane, have wooded edges and characteristically irregular profiles.

THE HISTORIC GREEN LANES

1. CHAPMAN’S LANE (SP469312)

‘The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, as long as we can see far enough.’⁵ With a mown sward and patches of snowdrop on the verges at the top of the lane in wintry February, Chapman’s Lane opens to wide views across cultivated fields descending to the valley of South Brook, and

takes the walker to the farm buildings and house of Leadenporch Farm. The dark wood along the eastern ramparts of Deddington Castle Grounds comes into view on the left; looking back, there is an inspiring sight of the tower of St Peter and St Paul; to the right, fields tumble to South Brook and rise beyond.

The name – ‘Chapman’s’ – may derive from a time when peddlers of chapbooks, perhaps as early as the 17th century, travelled the lane to Aston, Clifton and Somerton.

Of six hedges in the lane, all are overgrown, some are tall, others low and degraded, none tight or compact, or continuous with each other, giving an impression of incoherence, yet, unlike any other lane, some of its hedges are rich in lords-and-ladies and lesser celandine.

The most wooded part of the southwest side of Chapman’s Lane has five apple trees, ash, elder, elm, hawthorn and sycamore. Elder and elm are co-dominant, but, of course, elms never reach maturity, succumbing to the Dutch elm disease in their youth. In a low

hedge, with many gaps and openings, there are apple, three tall ash trees, blackthorn, dog rose, elder and elm (when I say ‘elm’ I mean English elm).

The Thames Water station on the north side is encircled by tall poplar trees and protected by a high fence holding me at bay and preventing species identification. The tallest hedge leads the eye skyward, where ash and field maple overtop towering elder, elm and hawthorn. After the Water Station, hedges disappear and a gently falling landscape unrolls in three directions: north, east and south.

2. SNAKEHILL LANE (SP442321)

Snakehill Lane is clearly visible on a map belonging to New College, called ‘Plan of an Estate at Deddington, in the County of Oxford, belonging to the Warden and Fellows of New College and Wm. Hudson their Lessee (1808)’, showing that each side is a mirror image of the other. The entrance to the lane is on level ground; there is no hint of the slope that lies ahead. The mown grass is dotted with young trees; there

are tall and bushy elder shrubs on one side, trees and shrubs on private ground behind a wooden fence on the other side, including beech, field maple and oak (when I say ‘oak’, I mean English or pedunculate oak.)

From the top of Snakehill Lane, there is a panoramic view of the River Swere valley, with Barford St Michael to the left, the little church of Barford St John in the middle distance, and the high ridge of the Milton Gated Road – all sweep into view, like the opening of a film, at a glance. Each moment of the year has its beauty, even the hours of day reveal the same field in different colours.

The hedges on the left have wide gaps, broad openings, low cut elder, dead elms and two ash trees; yet, one of these hedges has eight species of woody plants, the richest hedge in the lane. I am quite sure disease resistant elms could be planted in our hedges, and grow tall and sturdy. Hedges of the eastern side are of better structure. One of these joins with a boundary hedge, rich and substantial, dividing farm from farm.

**ANDRÉ TANSLEY VISITED SNAKEHILL LANE IN OCTOBER 2008,
AND MADE THESE OBSERVATIONS**

A gravel path, carefully mown grass and ornamental shrubs lead away from the top of the lane. The gardens are dramatic. From the brow of the hill, the Barfords are seen in the distance. A group of horses to the west stand motionless. The metallic chatter of a harrow, back and forth behind a huge green tractor. This view reminds me of the first purpose of the countryside: agriculture in full flow.

I descend further. A group of horses has gathered at the fence, looking expectantly toward a farmhouse. The fields ahead are deep browns. Two tractors, one red, one blue, pass back and forth, harrows rattling and creaking. Gulls follow the tractors, eating worms and insects upturned by the machinery. The field textures and colours change, a light show of brown-reds, as the harrows do their work. A rustle in the hedgerow – probably a rabbit – but perhaps this lane will live up to its name! The sun is watery now – time to turn for home.

In contrast, the hedge bordered by a deep ditch with seasonally running water supports four large oak trees. This is one of the rare hedges in the sector having Midland hawthorn and eight other species of woody plants, including apple, buckthorn and crack-willow. Hedges that looked unpromising from the head of the lane are unexpectedly rich at the finish.

Snakehill Lane is moderately steep with watery ditches on both sides of the lane. These ditches and their banks, here and everywhere in the parish, are habitat for great willowherb and meadowsweet. Agrimony, celery-leaved buttercup, greater knapweed, hogweed and nettle are also common.

These birds have been seen in Snakehill Lane often enough to be considered its 'regulars': blue tit, buzzard (high on the wing and cruising from the west), carrion crow, cuckoo (heard overhead), dunnock (scratching in the hedge bottom), kestrel, pheasant (alarmist of the hedgerow), reed bunting, swallow, wood pigeon and yellowhammer.

3. PAPER MILL LANE (SP466329)

The paper mill on Adderbury Grounds Farm of Adderbury parish, with fields in Deddington parish, was a corn mill when recorded in Domesday Book (1086). The lane may have been – surely it had been – established before the arrival of Norman lords, but the trees we see today give no evidence of antiquity.

Overgrown for a short distance on the north side, parallel hedges on the south side are sparse and degraded; on the verge of the inner side of these hedges, John Scott, with his compelling and vivid dream of fruit-bearing trees available to the passerby, planted wild cherry trees, giving the lane a domestic flavour.

Ash, blackthorn, hawthorn, elder, elm, field maple, horse-chestnut, oak and sycamore have grown tall and spindly on a portion of the north side. Woody plants too: bramble, dog rose and ivy twist and twirl round trees and shrubs.

Ash trees have regenerated from coppice stools in one segment of the wooded edge, an elder-dominated thicket with canopied trees. Blackthorn is dense near the head of the lane, but not continuously. The density of the north-side vegetation diminishes from west to east until gaps as wide as 6-8 m occur along a low hedge, neat and trim, neither woody nor stock proof. Oak trees are a gladdening feature of the lane.

In and beyond the lane, opening far vistas, I have seen some of those birds that are as common to the parish as willowherb: blackbird, blue tit, carrion crow, chaffinch, great tit, pheasant, song thrush, swallow (overhead), wood pigeon and yellowhammer. So ubiquitous are they in flight, so rapidly flying, low then high, wherever interest and an insect takes them, I am led to wonder: where do swallows reside?

4. DROVER'S ROAD (SP489304)

'Shepherds who attended with their flocks from long distances started from home two or three days, or even a week, before the fair, driving their charges a

few miles each day – not more than ten or twelve – and resting them at night in hired fields by the wayside at previously chosen points, where they fed, having fasted the morning. The shepherd of each flock marched behind, a bundle containing his kit for the week strapped upon his shoulder, and in his hand his crook, which he used as the staff of his pilgrimage.'⁶

The Drover's Road, Clifton, is a wide grassy track, nearly treeless, with high bushy hedges. The sides are roughly equal, evidence of sheep- and cattle-driving days, when (in the 17th century, for instance) the road was longer and extended to Bowman's Bridge, a conduit from the Astons and Somerton to Clifton, and on to Deddington's Market Square along the Clifton Road. The sheep were penned in the lane, or in a holding pen adjoining it, while the drover took his ease and had a pint in the Duke of Cumberland.

Half the hedges have more than five species; blackthorn, uncommon in the parish, occurs in two of these. The frequency of apple is similar to other lanes. There are two large oak trees, and one extra large,

widely spaced, survivors of a 19th-century avenue of oaks. In the 1881 OS map, six trees are indicated on the eastern side, fourteen on the western side, trees we presume to have been oak. Although Drover's Road hedges are dense, they are not perfectly stock proof, nor do they need to be.

Jackie and Mike Williamson walked the Drover's Road frequently; below are Jackie's notes from her diary. When they left Clifton, they gave us a list of 49 species of birds seen over a span of years. This valuable record has been incorporated in the Bird Species List for the parish.

5. GREEN HEDGES LANE (SP471319)

Green Hedges Lane, once called Lover's Lane, is closest to the centre of Deddington village. The hedges of the two sides are roughly equal in structure and aspect: tall and bushy, overgrown but regular in profile, and treeless, except for two tall ash trees. Component hedges are more impressive in uniformity of height, width and density, than those of Chapman's, Cosy or

Snakehill Lanes; nevertheless, tits chatter and wrens dart in and out of the hedges low to the ground. The lane was rated 'not good' for birds in the BOS survey, but I have always found it more entertaining than any of the others.

In the equality of its sides, Green Hedges Lane is like Drover's Road, suggesting it too was a way for cattle. Close to the village market, it would have been convenient to hold cattle penned in the lane overnight. Trees were once abundant on both sides (cf. 1808 OS map); they are now rare. The 1808 map shows a wide-open space (later enclosed) on the west side, two small fields (once there were many more small fields; those in Green Hedges Lane are as much a historical record as a boundary stone) and a large enclosed one on the east side. The small field may have been a stocking-pen, what Thomas Hardy called a 'hired field by the wayside'.

In the eight hedges composing Green Hedges Lane, blackthorn and hawthorn take turns dominating segments. Elder is common; ash is abundant, but seldom tall. Apple, buckthorn, field maple, hazel, sycamore,

JACKIE WILLIAMSON ON THE DROVER'S ROAD

- 1 • Staying on the track past the barns of Home Farm, a view opens across the fields. Jays and squirrels in tall trees of the small copse. Passing a field popular with foxes, a view opens to the south. Cow parsley on the verges, hares skedaddle in a meadow, skylarks sing above.
- 2 • The track is now bordered by a hedge of hawthorn and interspersed with oaks and an old pollarded willow. Blackberries abound. Windswept fields on the right are grazed by roe deer attracted by young shoots of rape.
- 3 • The hedge ends; a wide vista unfolds, a giddy feeling of open space takes the place of confinement, the eye running to the River Cherwell, boundary of the floodplain meadows. Sheep graze; but when flooded in autumn and winter, a different fauna arrives: wading birds, gulls – in the hundreds – terns and mute swans.
- 4 • Carry straight on to the next gate. I have seen roe deer, foxes, rats and hares in these fields; more the treat of coming often than the treat of one day's walk.
- 5 • Go through the gate and cross the field diagonally, keeping the oak tree to the right; at the other side of the field, keep to the hedgerow. Bowman's Bridge is now in sight, and a watery boundary of the parish.
- 6 • Clamour! A rookery is here. Cross the bridge, entering Somerton parish; take the way to the canal. In spring, there are chamomile, lady's smock, wild pansy and poppies. Old pollarded willows defy death and harbour life with plants on their boughs, fungi in their bark, lichens and mosses on their branches, and birds to hunt for the insects that live here too.

JACKIE WILLIAMSON ON THE DROVER'S ROAD

7 • After seeing the canal, regain Bowman's Bridge; go through the next gate, keeping straight on until the track bears round to the left and is bordered by the hedges cut and laid in 1996/97. They are a strong barrier, effective sanctuary for birds and wildlife. A short way on, pass through the gate on the right. Homeward bound, about a mile to go.

8 • From the next gate, old hedgerows are alive with birds and animals. You may see (and I hope you do see): badger tracks in soft ground, fox scats, rabbit diggings and roe deer prints. Kestrels and sparrowhawks hunt here. In summer, two pairs of garden warblers sang and passed between the two tall oaks. Their singing is so richly varied – each has five songs – that I was misled, thinking a pair was a chorus.

9 • Herons at the fishing pond. A kingfisher in a willow on the island. Wren, robin, chaffinch, greenfinch, thrush and blackbird common in these hedges. The bridleway comes to Chapel Close, the main road, and the Duke of Cumberland.

10 • Birds also frequently seen: barn owl, blackbird, blue tit, buzzard, Canada goose, carrion crow, chaffinch, coal tit, collared dove, coot, cuckoo, curlew, dunnoek, fieldfare, garden warbler, goldcrest, great tit, greenfinch, green woodpecker, gulls, heron, house martin, house sparrow, jay, kestrel, kingfisher, lapwing, lesser spotted woodpecker, magpie, mallards, mistle thrush, moorhen, mute swan, partridge, pheasant, pied wagtail, robin, rook, skylark, song thrush, sparrowhawk, starling, swallow, swift, terns, tree sparrow, wood pigeon, wren, yellowhammer.



Above: From the summit of Snakehill Lane, in the hamlet of Hempton, the fields fold down to the valley of the River Swere.



A bullfinch (**above**) on lichen-rich branches and a peacock butterfly (**below**), with a clear view of its 'eyes'.



A blue tit and ivy (**above**) and a painted lady (**below**), possibly the most widespread butterfly in the world, living in temperate and tropical climates.



Above: The pinnaced church tower of St Peter and St Paul seen from Green Hedges Lane, looking across a field belonging to Earl's Farm.

wild cherry and Wych elm, make a rich mixture of woody plant species (only a short walk from the village centre), and vary the look of the hedge. Here is a lane in which to practice woody plant identification; children from the Primary School could venture this far to see the difference between ash and apple.

Knowing the date of the Parliamentary Enclosure Act (1809), we might guess that Green Hedges Lane hedges were planted in the same year, at least on one side; but species richness is unequally distributed. Hedges at the head of a lane tend to be species rich. This is true in Chapman's, Paper Mill, Snakehill and Tithe Lanes; it is the reason why in counting hedgerow species using Hooper's Rule, ends are not counted.

Apple (*Malus* sp.; here 'sp' means these apple species are neither cultivated nor wild; we don't know how to name them to the species level with certainty) occurs in six of the eight, or 75%, of these hedges. On the north side of the Milton Gated Road, there were eight apple trees in three hedges, and at the bottom of Cosy Lane, there were 14 apple trees, cut to shrubs, in one hedge.

There are no species on the western side that are rare in parish hedges; this is not true of the eastern side, where there is one wild cherry, possibly planted, and one grey willow and one buckthorn.

The 1793 Richard Davis map of Deddington parish contrasts open fields with closes of nucleated settlements. As shown on the Davis map, Earl's Lane was not joined with Castle Street, but it was joined in Hugh Colvin's plan of the town in 1808.⁷ Two hedges of special interest are outside of Green Hedges Lane. One is at the head of the lane on the eastern side, with seven species, and the other is next to Brock House, with six species.

Spindle, a species found in only five sites in the parish, occurs in the hedge at the head of the lane. 'Hazel and spindle are characteristic of hedges which are ... pre-Tudor.'⁸ Fruits of spindle are so attractive; these shrubs were probably planted, and not long ago.

Hedges in this lane have been let to grow taller than is normal in most of the parish lanes; yet they have

ANDRÉ TANSLEY VISITING GREEN HEDGES LANE, OCTOBER 2008

An apple tree laden with red fruit in autumn sunlight. Haws scarlet against a menacing sky to the west and yet, looking right, that same scarlet contrasts with a deep blue.

The horizon is obscured at first. Leaves rustle and dance across my path. Unexpected colours in the hedgerow; abundance of haws in their autumn scarlet. Pink flowers and nascent green fruits of blackberries.

Golden stubble in the fields, the farmer doesn't yet seem to have reached here with his plough. A gust of wind and a shower of leaves fall at 45 degrees, landing silently all around. The rich smell of livestock. I stop at the field gate and stile at the end of the lane, looking down to watch beef cattle, some standing, some not. Will it rain?

A pair of pigeons take to the air, their wings squeaking as if in need of oil. The lane ends at a field gate. The pasture, which the farmer is not keen to have walkers enter – and there is no path here – unrolls downhill to a pair of barns, well stocked with fodder for cattle standing motionless, their young in close attendance.

Suddenly the bushes to my left heave and shudder – the crack of twigs. A female roe deer cautiously pushes her head out, sees me not two metres away and has to make a decision. She springs into the lane, passes within a metre of me and scampers off, her white tail bobbing into the distance. Another rustle and this time her fawn, much smaller, looks deeply into my eyes. The best solution is retreat: it shuffles backwards, turns and is gone. I hurry away, enabling mother and fawn to regroup. I look back, but they have gone.

not formed wooded edges. Indeed, they are excellent boundaries and barriers. To our advantage, this lane so near the Market Square, is one of the most birdacious of all the lanes. Commonly seen were: blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch, dunnock, pheasant, pied wagtail, robin, wood pigeon, wren and yellowhammer. Where the lane ends, there is a stile, a notice of a bull in the field (Dairy Ground on Earl's Farm), and a view of a footpath at the bottom of the steep field leading to the site of the 12th-century mill on Adderbury Grounds Farm.

6. JERUSALEM LANE (SP478488)

Jerusalem Lane was once a cart track to a Roman quarry (Tatles Pits); now it is a boulevard to a large farmhouse, paved and edged, with the formal ornament of mature oak trees. Although the lane is not shown on the 1793 Richard Davis map, its hedges are species rich.

The lane has two parts: a wide and evenly paved roadway, and the continuation of this roadway, just as wide but unpaved, grassy, rutted, muddy and wild with vegetation. Along the paved way there are full-

ched (1-2 m wide) hedges of medium height, with oak trees irregularly spaced, but the sides are unequal, with more oaks on the eastern side, the boundary for Home Farm.

One imagines catastrophe struck one side more than the other, for the oak trees regularly spaced on the eastern side are unpartnered on the western side. Consulting the 1881 OS map, we find that there were no more oaks then than now. Two trees still stand on the western side; on the eastern side there is a bonanza of oak trees, but also much change. Ten of 25 trees indicated on the 1881 map have been lost.

In correction of this imbalance, Alastair Welford, the farmer of Leadenporch Farm, has planted 61 horse-chestnut trees. On average, trees in each row are planted 12 m apart; the tree of one side is generally opposite a tree on the other.

Where the paved way ends, and the grassy lane begins, there is an extra large oak tree, greater than any of the oaks along the paved way. Jerusalem Lane-East (as I call it) is shown as a single dashed line on the 1814

enclosure map, one of the first Ordnance Survey maps of England (Map Room, Bodleian Library); Jerusalem Lane-West is shown as a double-dashed line. The vegetation of both sides is wild and unruly. Neither has many trees – an ash here, a sycamore there – but each side is distinctive.

Buckthorn occurs in 80% of the hedges, a frequency far greater than its parish average, and it is locally abundant. Here then is a good place to meet buckthorn and makes its acquaintance.

There is only one field maple. A feature worthy of remark is that there are no gaps or wide spaces between shrubs and trees on the eastern side. Where hawthorn abuts an oak tree, it clings to it, two species entangled as one.

Hawthorn shows great variability in the hedges, leaves from light yellow-green to dark green, from large to tiny, and from deeply lobed to slightly indented. I have not seen such variability in any other group of hedges. The argument could be made that enclosure

hedges, ordered from the same nursery on the same day, would have less variety than older hedges that evolved more slowly, with some components from local woodland.

Elder rises to 6-9 m, and is dominant for a long stretch, but then it has spent its force and does not occur again. Hazel is locally dominant and honeysuckle, uncommon to rare in parish hedges, is abundant lower down the lane.

Visiting Jerusalem Lane in May 1999, Kristin Thompson found that the verges were ‘superb’; their width and fullness of flowers pleased her.

In Mr Morris’s survey⁹ of yellowhammer nesting sites on Leadenporch Farm, he found 20 pairs nesting in four hedges along the paved way of Jerusalem Lane. Yellowhammers build two nests in a season, the first at ground level, facing a ditch, and then, when the leaves of the shrubs have filled out, they build a second one, making use of newly available concealment. The hedge must be compact. This preference

for nesting sites puts pause to simplistic models for the protection of songbirds by conservation of hedges. In the same survey, 13 linnet nests were found in Jerusalem Lane and adjoining field hedges.

Chaffinches select tall trees. 'Trees in hedges or fields were visited [by chaffinches] on 45% of recorded feeding flights, despite their forming less than 1% of the area on all study farms.'¹⁰ On the other hand, cut hedges were used 'only infrequently by adult chaffinches ...' The same bird shows other preferences: '97% of feeding flights to trees were to Oaks and Willows despite several other species being common on study farms, such as Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Elm (*Ulmus* ssp.).'¹¹

Birds seen along the paved way of Jerusalem Lane include: blackbird, carrion crow, and herring gulls flying overhead and seen when the fields were being ploughed; seen too were kestrel, magpie, robin, rook, wood pigeon, wren and yellowhammer. I have seen more yellowhammers in winter, when they form flocks and fly along the hedge tops, and

more often in out of the way places in the parish than in Jerusalem Lane.

7. TITHE LANE (SP489309)

Tithe Lane was the path to King's Sutton, its church spire seen the whole way; King's Sutton was quite possibly 'an early royal vil'¹² in Mercian times, a minster and holy place, attracting Cliftonians on special religious occasions. The lane runs on high ground above the floodplain meadows of the Cherwell River valley. More than half way along the lane, a footpath diverges to the left and leads to the site of the old paper mill on Adderbury Grounds Farm. Tithe Lane continues toward the junction of the River Swere with the River Cherwell.

As in some lanes, species richness decreases from the head of the lane. For example, elm is abundant early and absent later; one red currant, probably a garden escape, and one large black poplar, probably planted, contribute to richness at the head of the lane. A flush of field maple in both hedges at the

head of the lane gives me cheer, my favorite small tree of parish hedges.

On the eastern side of the lane, hedges are rich, broad, sturdy, medium-tall, well-cut and well-knitted; they form the western boundary of Boulderdyke Farm. Elder dominates the Castle Farm side, hawthorn the other, but both are fronted by a deep ditch with great willowherb and a wide grassy verge. A distinction of Tithe Lane is that it has more Midland hawthorn than other lanes. Walking past the ruins of Hazelhedge Farm, and onward to the River Swere, there are no hedges; nor is the lane a birdy place, but one might see chaffinch, greenfinch, skylark, song thrush, swallow, wood pigeon and yellowhammer.

8. COSY LANE (SP461321)

Cosy Lane starts in The Daedings, once the right of way to Deddington Mill. No other lane gives such ready access to so many boys on bicycles, or so many fathers with family dogs. Cosy Lane has a flat top and

a flat bottom, and a long slope in between. The summit is planted with three wild cherry trees. Leaving the ornamented verges, the sides are unequally scattered with trees, some great, more on the east than the west side; the east side might once have been a farm boundary.

An aspen, one white poplar, a hornbeam and a small-leaved lime on the east side represent a local outburst of the wish to better the hedges and ornament the lane. Goat willow and grey willow, planted or self-sown, grow in a wet ditch on the other side. Before the hedges are cut by flail in mid-summer, the dense foliage conceals the gaps, but not from rabbits.

Because the hedges of the west side are starkly degraded, it is easy to pass them by without noticing that field maple is present in some. Only at the bottom of the lane, where the slope flattens, are there tall trees: 11 ash, of which five are extra large; eight oak trees, of which six are extra large (dbh from 100 cm; 'dbh' = diameter breast

André Tansley on Cosy Lane, October 2008

Cosy Lane — a fitting name for what is, perhaps, the most popular of the parish's green lanes. A kestrel hangs in the air, silent, totally focused on its prey. It doesn't seem to notice as I, and others, pass by.

Near the head of the lane, with expansive views, there is a bench dedicated to the memory of John I. Goddard (1925-98), Friend of Daeda's Wood. He walked this way often, and used to remark: I wish there were a bench to catch my breath and idle awhile.

The hedge to the left is cut low, brutally flailed, but we know that it will regenerate all the stronger. Small groups of walkers appear, an enthusiastic young golden Labrador bounces along the field to my left, oblivious to all but its ball and the owner it clearly is trying so hard to please.

The crunch of shavings under my boots and the tinkling of the stream as it accompanies me downhill to the Swere compete with the distant shouts of a football match. Eventually all human sounds recede and only the faint rustling of leaves in the wind breaks the silence.

A huge ash tree, snapped cleanly about 6 m above the ground still shows signs of life, despite the encroaching ivy.

The path levels and meets a small track. This is the way to Daeda's Wood. I turn and contemplate the long climb back. My shadow has lengthened. The low light reveals the complex pattern of furrows running down the hillside. The few buildings glow golden in the late afternoon sun.

high, a standard forestry measure), one medium-small (dbh less than 59 cm), and two crack-willow trees, of which one is large and the other massive. In the late 19th century, there were even more trees (indicated on OS 1881); today there are 50% fewer trees than 120 years ago. But there are two sapling oaks, one in a hedge on each side. The ditch parallel to the lane on the eastern side is 2.5-3 m deep in places and has running water in July, even after 15 days without rain. Water-cress grew in the ditch; on the bank was a large population of meadowsweet.

Janet and Richard Broadbent walked down Cosy Lane in February 2007 to see the birds. More birds (blackbird, blue tit, carrion crow, chaffinch, dunnock, great tit, starling and wood pigeon) were seen within the built-up area at the top of the lane than at the bottom (blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch, great tit, wren), suggesting that bird richness of many species is facilitated more by proximity to human habitations than in isolation from them! (Visit Green Hedges Lane and compare its bird life with Plumdon Lane.)

9. PLUMDON LANE (SP469305)

Plumdon Lane, once a drove road, is the richest lane in woody species, and the most remote from the village. Jim Calcutt's grandfather drove sheep from Wales to Bicester along this lane. If Richard Davis is right, Plumdon Lane is not so old, for it is not shown on his 1793 map, but the 1814 OS map shows Plumdon Lane with hedges on both sides.

The north side is a mini-wood, with a high species count; the south side is less rich, medium-high, with no trees, and many gaps. A survey of the north-side wood was made by Tom Curtis and Justin Mathews, then of the Forestry Institute, University of Oxford. Marking a station every 10 m, at 76 stations they drew a transect line perpendicular to the edge or baseline of each station. The wood is 2.5 m wide in the narrowest places, 4-5 m wide at 50% of the stations, 6.3 m wide near the western end. There are occasionally gaps and two wide openings; it is most degraded at the eastern end, near the entrance from the A4260.

RESULTS OF THE PLUMDON LANE SURVEY

Plumdon Lane's wooded edge is dominated by ash in the overstorey and by hawthorn in the understorey. Elder is common; blackthorn and oak occur less often. Elm is more common than sycamore. The overstorey is intermittent rather than continuous.

While the east side of Plumdon Lane is a wooded edge, there are fewer songbirds than in Green Hedges Lane. Muntjac deer hide in the wide edge, and wood pigeons nest in its trees. Isolation does not suit all birds. Morris reported that the 'linnet is most abundant in hedges without mature trees and in low hedges'; 'greenfinch is most abundant in wide

hedges and tends to be more abundant in hedges containing many mature trees'¹³; dunnock and lesser whitethroat, like linnet, prefer tall hedges with many trees.¹⁴ Blackbird, blackcap, blue tit, chaffinch, great tit, house sparrow, lark, linnet, pheasant, robin, rook, whitethroat, wood pigeon, wren and yellowhammer – all have been seen, from time to time, in Plumdon Lane.

Visiting the lanes time and time again, I felt I was secretary to their natural history. There was work to do; yet the pleasure they gave was in the constancy of their surprises. 'When a traveller asked Wordsworth's servant to show him the master's study, she answered: "Here is his library, but his study is out of doors."¹⁵

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Historic Green Lanes of Deddington Parish is a chapter taken from my forthcoming book, *The Natural History of Deddington Parish*. My thanks to Gavin Bird and the TVERC (Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre) for their support of this booklet. Thanks to Robert R. Worth (New York City) for editing the chapter and indeed the whole of *The Natural History of Deddington Parish*, and for being patron of this forthcoming book. Thanks to George Fenimore and Kristin Thompson, both superior naturalists. Without Peter Terry's help over a period of eight years, the plant life and lanes of Deddington parish would not have been mapped. Thanks to Jackie Williamson, formerly of Clifton, for writing her observations of the natural history of the Drover's Road. Philip Rigby stepped forward in late winter to mobilize the help of the recently formed AD&D (Adderbury, Deddington and District) Photography Society to take photographs in and from the lanes whilst I was in Mexico; it was a challenging and successful task. Thanks to André Tansley for responding to the landscape in words poetic and true. Geoff and Joan Todd have been a constant support of this booklet and of the larger work, *The Natural History of Deddington Parish*.

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Funding support from TVERC (Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre), Woodstock, Oxon.

Cover map by Peter Terry; based on privately commissioned aerial photographs, courtesy of Deddington Map Group

Photograph credits: Photographs of the view from the top of Snakehill Lane, St Peter and St Paul from Green Hedges Lane, the bullfinch and the blue tit are by courtesy of Philip A. Rigby; the peacock and painted lady photographs are by courtesy of Peter Sheasby

Design and layout by Wendy Meagher

Typeset in Perpetua and Abadi

Printed by Kall Kwik Banbury