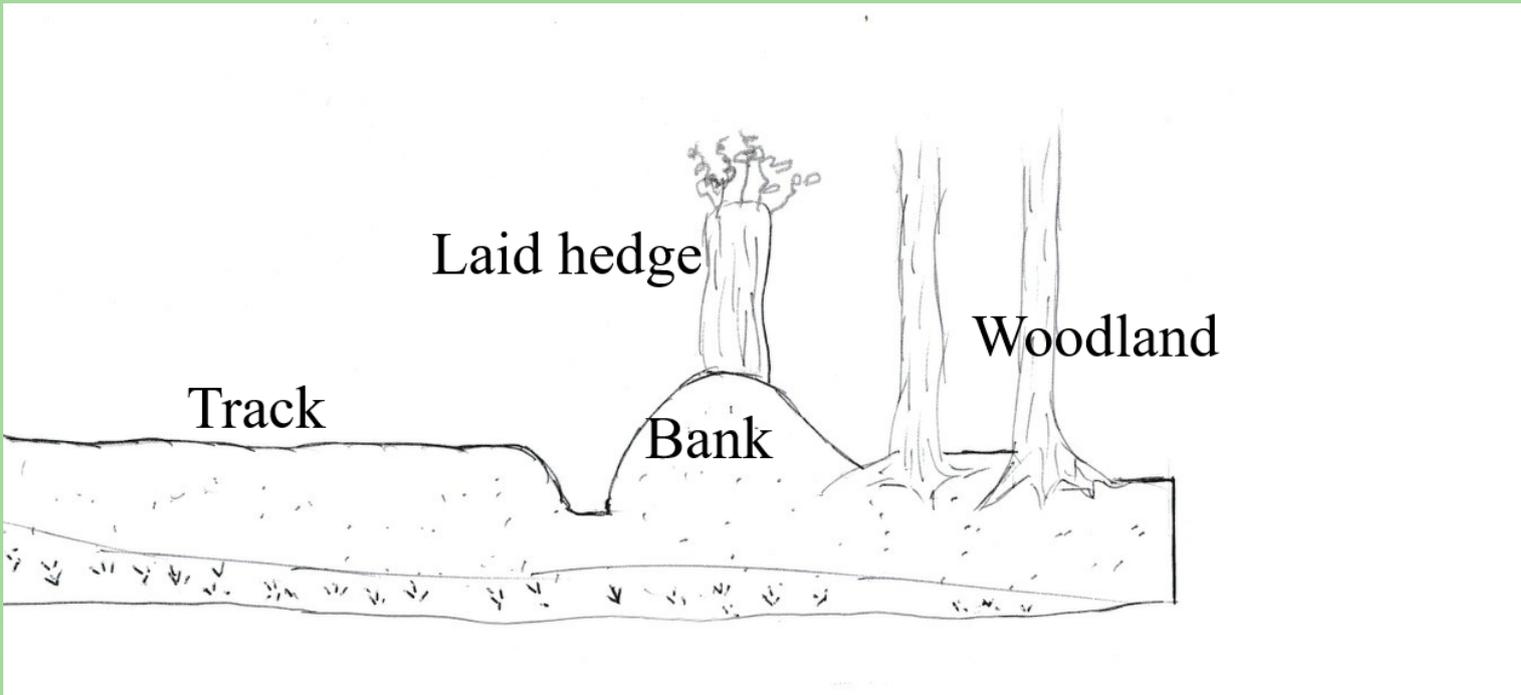


Danehill Parish Trackways

A romp around the parish; where and why trackways existed. Based on the work of Derek Rawlings and current members of the society

This is part one of a talk given to DPHS in November 2017 on how to recognise old trackways and the extent of the ancient trackway system of Danehill Parish.

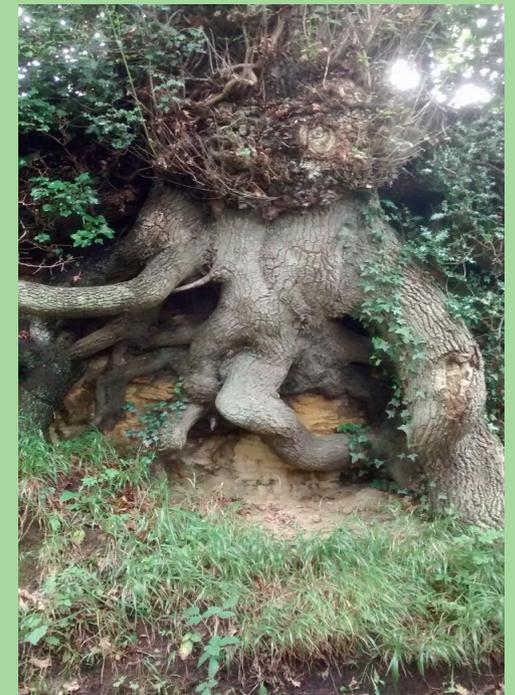
Old Trackway Profile



Old tracks were often bounded by a ditch and bank, usually with a hedge planted on top of the bank. Wood was a vital resource for building, fencing, charcoal and firewood and it was important to keep deer and other herbivores out of the woodland, especially after coppicing

Recognising an old track

Examples of old laid hedges planted on top of a bank. The hedges have been neglected and grown into mature trees, but the distorted shapes and horizontal sections tell us they began life as a laid hedge. Banks with trees like this are a common feature of old tracks in this area.



Holloways, a common feature of old tracks



Downhill sections of old tracks are subject to erosion. The track-way surface is loosened by generations of traffic and the loose material has been washed away by rain leaving a hollow.

Ancient Woodland Plant Species indicate an old track

- A large hedge on a trackway bank is a suitable habitat for woodland plant species
- Ancient woodland (400 years +) contains some very slow spreading plant species which are adapted to woodland
- These species on a trackway bank suggest that the bank is centuries rather than decades old

Examples of Ancient Woodland Indicator Species.

Clockwise from the left, Wood anemone, Bluebell, Primrose and the fern Polypody. There are many other Indicator species, but these are especially common in this area. The fern is generally found on dark, damp banks

In conclusion, if a track has a section of old laid hedge and bank, hollowed sections and these plant species it is likely to be an ancient track.



Old Tracks In Hiding

Often an old track has become overgrown and is some distance away from the modern pathway. In this example the modern track is on the left hand photo, but on the other side of the fence in the wood, the original track is evident as the holloway in the right hand photo



Hard to Find Track Example 2

The track in the left hand photo does not look old at all. It is very narrow, a one species hedge on the left and a modern fence on the right. But look through the hedge and there are traces of the old wood bank as you can see in the right hand photo.

Here the landowner has encroached on the old track and planted a new hedge down the middle of the carriageway!



Hard to Find Track Example 3

The track on the left appears to be a modern farm access track, but when we get close to the tree we can see this tree was clearly part of a large hedge. On its own this would not be enough to confirm antiquity, but further south there are holloways and ancient woodland plants, which confirm the age.



Mount Noddy Cottage



Another difficult to find old track is at Noddy Cottage, Church Lane (left). The footpath going past has a single species hedge on the left and a wire fence on the right (bottom left). However Noddy Cottage has two drives one going out to Church Lane and one not going anywhere. What has happened is that the old track has been moved away from the house.

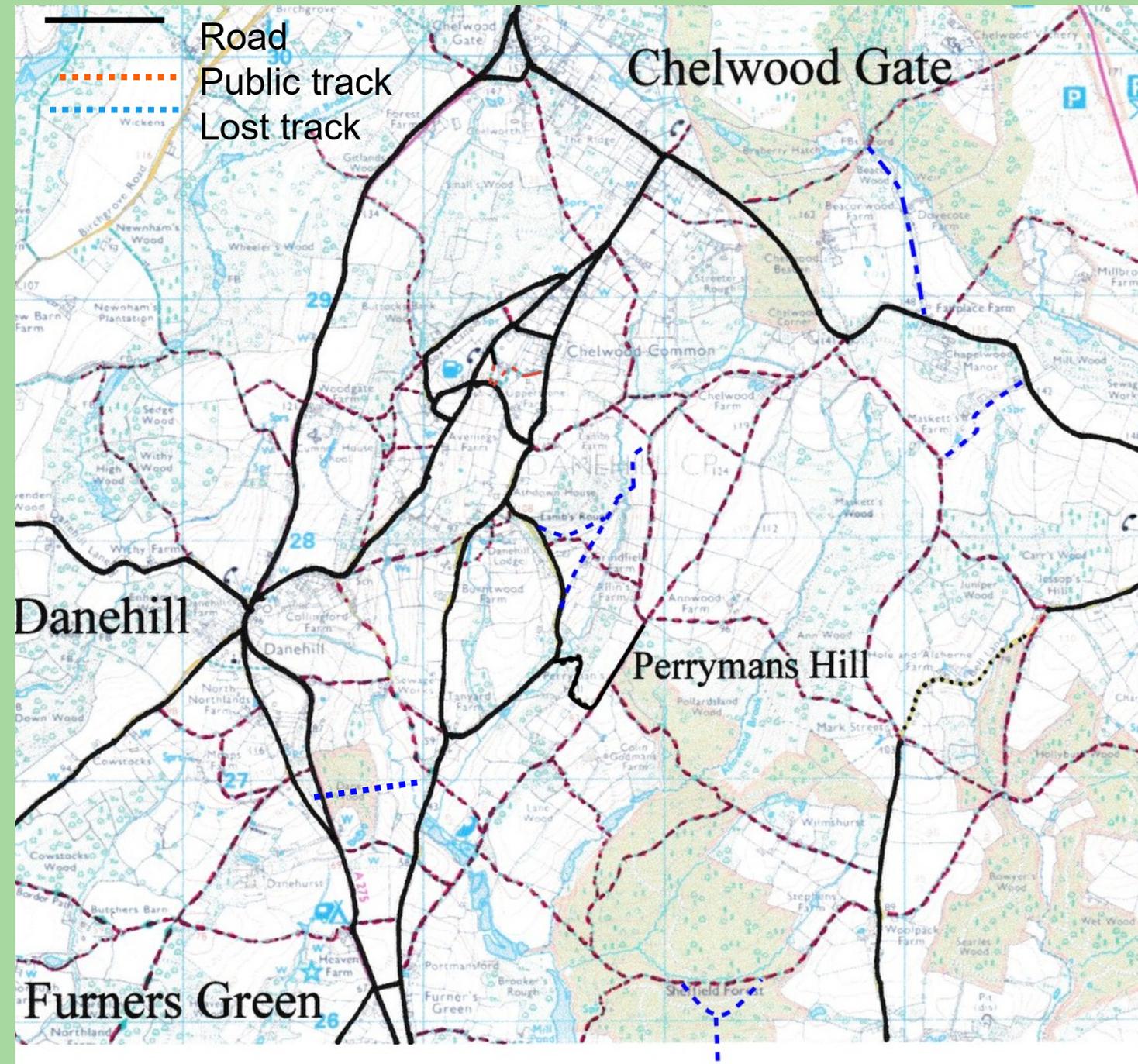
Originally the track went down one drive along the house front and along the second drive to then regain its course.



Findings from Footpath Walking by Members

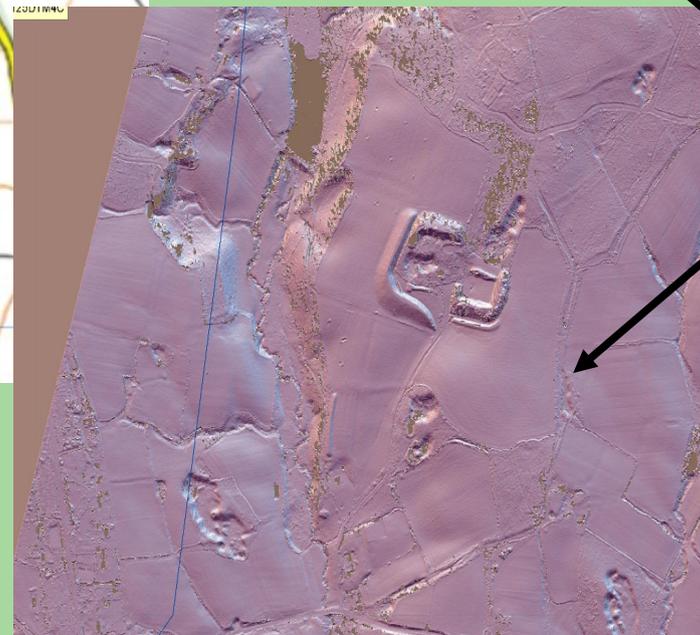
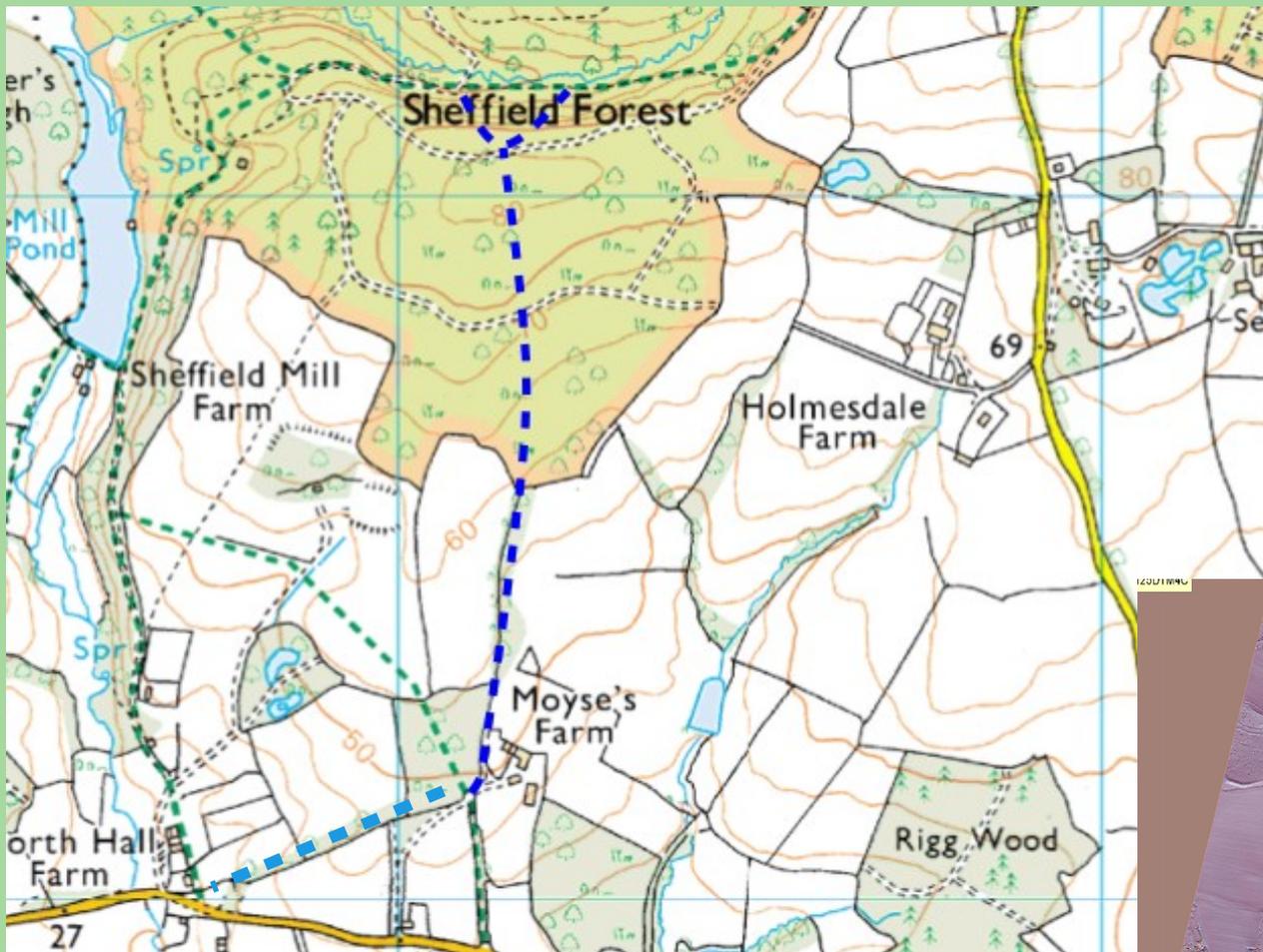
The DPHS study of the local tracks showed that almost all of the local footpaths and bridleways were very old. The network of tracks was far more extensive than the modern road network and included the whole parish whereas the road network is concentrated in the west. Notice how there were several East-West routes which have now reduced to just the Chelwood Gate to Nutley road. This road is closely aligned to the Roman route suggested by Margary.

Recent development in the parish is almost entirely confined to the modern road network and the east of the parish has hardly changed in centuries.



Lost Highway Identified by Geraldine Crawshaw

A Grant of Land in Fletching, 1285, which mentions **'the King's Highway from the Wolpett and leads towards the house of John atte Nordhall'** led to the discovery of this old track through Sheffield Forest. The line of the track is shown on the map in blue dashes



Track route
On the aerial
Photo and
Lidar

Nordhall is now North Hall farm and Wolpett
Is now The Woolpack on Bell Lane, the
yellow road on the map.

Photo of the King's Highway through Sheffield Forest. Note the substantial banks still remaining. Anne and the collie give an idea of scale.



Hopefully the article has given you some interest in old tracks and will help you to identify them. Once you start looking you will find them everywhere in East Sussex. If you find an old track, which has gone out of use and is now lost, please let DPHS know!

I DREAM OF A
BETTER TOMORROW...
WHERE CHICKENS
CAN CROSS ROADS
AND NOT HAVE THEIR
MOTIVES
QUESTIONED.

