

Parish Field Names Survey

Over the past year the field names recorded on the 1833/4 tithe maps have been collated. – You may have seen the map of names taking shape at meetings last year. Over 400 fields were identified from the five tithe schedules, one for each of the older ecclesiastical parishes contributing land now lying within the current parish boundary. Often words lost to modern English usage are retained in such field names. Such names reveal a picture of our community as it was during the early part of the 19th Century, and may also provide clues to land use and ownership back to the much earlier medieval period. Sorting a small selection of these field names into their various types tells a story about the social history of our Villages.

Not unsurprisingly for an area dominated by woodland, where trees have played a crucial part in the local economy, there are fields called **Ashen Grove, Crab Tree Field, Further Nut Hazel, Great Oak, Furzen Wood** (*i.e. gorse*) **Willow Close** and **Sawpit Close**. Other names describe features related to this woodland, such as **Folly Field** - *a wooded outcrop*, **Hedgefield, Hays Hill** and **Haylands** – *all fields enclosed by hedges*, **Readings** (*from Old English ryding*) and meaning ‘a clearing in a wood’, **Grovers Meadow** – *land provided in return for managing woodland* and **Stockings** and **Stocked Field** – *a field full of tree stumps*. The importance of fruit trees, particularly cherries, is indicated in names such as **Crabtree Field, Cherry Platt** and **Cherry Walk** as well as numerous orchards attached to homesteads.

Unsurprisingly, many names have associations with farming. For example, **Flexmans** and **Hempass** indicate the importance of Flax in the 18th and early 19th centuries. **Calves Plat, Carthorse Close, Pound Field** and **Hog Field** are obvious. The size of fields has been a functional, if uninspiring, way to identify fields. All the following acreages can be found: - **one, two, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten and twelve**. In not untypical humour for earlier times, there is even one called **Thousand Acre Field**, indicating a very small field! Names such as **Starveacre, Stoney Field, White Hawridge** and **Little Peppers** suggest that the quality of the soil is poor. In contrast, **Long Malm** and **Green Meadow** suggest fertility. The availability of water, particularly in the summer, also limited the utility of land for grazing as well as for human use. Sources of water were valued and illustrated in fields such as **Horse Pond, Well Close, Pond Meadow, Slough Pond** and **Great Fishpond**.

As you might expect animals also figure: - **Badgers Hill, Larking Meadow** and **Peacocks Meadow**.

Well known family names occur, for example, fields named after two of the most influential farming dynasties of the 1600's, the **Baldwins** and **Putnams**. Other families that get a mention include **Dwight** and **Gearys**. The Church owned much land and this link is seen in **Parsons Wick** and **Chapel Croft** at St Leonards, and a **Church Meadow** in Hawridge and Cholesbury. Local trades and industries have also left their mark with such names as, **Shop Field, Chalk Pit, Gravel Pit, Pit Close, Buckland Kiln Field, Kiln Piece, Lime Kiln Meadow, Pottery Road Piece, and Clay Acre**. Fields associated with pubs include **Lion Hill** (The White Lion) and **Black Horse Meadow**.

The shape or topography of the field can often dictate its name as in the eponymous **Three Corner Piece** – now known simply as ‘The Triangle’ or, somewhat exaggerated, **The Mountain** as well as **Great Slipe**, - *a long thin field*, **The Pightle** – *a small piece of land*, two fields by the name **The Lagger** – *a narrow strip of land* and **Winding Piece** – *a curved field*.

Three of the most interesting named fields are **Little Sanfoin** – indicating the presence of a red plant related to clover valued for making good quality hay, **Honey Pot Meadow** – maybe because bees were particularly attracted to flowers or possibly due to the stickiness of the soil and **Deal Bank** derived from the word ‘*Dial*’ and indicating that a sundial was once located there possibly by the cutting of turf.

Several of the names still used today indicate that land in this locality has been under agricultural management for many hundreds of years. Such names as **Park Furlong** – *an enclosed division of a larger common field*, **Broad Baulk** – *an unploughed gap between furrows originally part of a former common field*, **Pinnocks Leath** – *field near the ridge of a hill* and **Great Lince** – *ploughed terraces on sloping fields* have connections with the large common fields where individually allocated strips of land were farmed collectively from medieval times.

If you are interested in the fields close to you, or have any relevant documents, please get in touch. We are hoping to make the research information more widely available to members over the coming year.

Chris Brown