

# THE LANES & FOOTPATHS OF ABBOTSKERSWELL

## INTRODUCTION

During the years that we have been researching the History of Abbotskerswell we have plodded along the footpaths and lanes of the parish looking for remnants of the village's past, without ever really giving a second thought to the history of the paths themselves. It was as I was walking along the path that links Corn Park Road and Odle Hill that the importance of the lanes, and the idea of a booklet on them, came to me. Obviously there is no point in repeating material that has been included in our *Abbotskerswell Village History Series* but the idea is to describe the paths, their history and their place in the village's history in the hope that you may fancy a walk along them. When I have included content about the story of places which is already in our publications, and which you might find useful, I have put the reference to the volume where it can be found in superscript after the name, like this <sup>1</sup>.

I tend to use the term 'footpath' loosely as some are exactly that, and designated as such, but others are lanes or paths, that can be used by the public. Whilst some of these lanes are public right of ways, others are open but lead to at private property, therefore I will not suggest carrying on without a clear warning. There is no real order to the paths that I describe, just as they come to mind I suppose.

We have also added a chapter on the village's orchards in response to the creation of the Community Orchard; well done Amy for getting it going. Also a big thank you to AbbFest whose grant made it possible for us to produce and distribute this publication free to villagers.

Peter Wade



## Chapter 1

### Roads, Lanes and Footpaths

It may help your understanding of the story of the village's by-ways if they are placed in a historical perspective, and some terms explained.

The village's road system was, in general, a consequence of its agricultural development, since this was the main reason why, for centuries, people had moved around; they needed to get from field to field. Since different people owned the fields and they were separated by hedges, tracks were built to link them together. As people began to work further afield these lanes were used and improved where necessary.

This picture of Ethel Norton, nee Folland, was taken in 1920s; her job was to take loads of stone from Stoneycombe Quarry to wherever they were needed. Look carefully at the vehicle involved, which was typical of the time and in fact of the centuries before. The lanes around Abbotskerswell were constructed for this type of trans-



port, meaning they were narrow, and as there were so few vehicles then only a few passing places were needed should they meet. Double carriageways were simply not necessary. The lanes were muddy in winter and hard and dry in summer; when holes were formed they were filled in with stones.

It was only as motor cars, with pneumatic tyres, began to appear that better road surfaces were needed. This is when tarmacadam began to appear to aid speed on the roads. The consequence of this was that the 'main roads' were improved, but the lanes only used by horses and carts, like Ethel's, remained as they were; in time roads kept improving and lanes stayed as they were. By the 1950s tractors were taking over from horses and they could manage the lanes' rough surfaces, but even so some lanes disappeared as hedges were removed to make fields bigger for the new and bigger machinery.

A good example of this process was the two routes from Abbotskerswell to Langford Bridge at the bottom of Priory Road. We are all familiar with the road that hauls up the hill to The Priory and drops down the other side, but there was a second route until the mid-1800s. Looking at the 1887 Ordnance Survey map the lane that is known as Vicarage Road runs out along the valley bottom before splitting into two; Rydon Lane goes further down the hill whilst the other lane branches off around the base of the hill that contains Abbotsleigh Priory. Then just below the Priory it stops. However, we know from two sources that this lane had originally continued around the base of the hill until it reached Langford Bridge.



The 1809 OS map shown here clearly shows the two roads out of the village which meet at the bottom of what was then known as Langford Bridge Lane, now Priory Road. This is also shown very clearly in the village Tithe Map of 1839, shown below, following the field boundaries all the way to 'Longford' as it was written.



The stories of Revd. George Fisher <sup>1</sup> and Charles Braine <sup>2</sup> in the 1850s describe the battle to have the lower lane reactivated, as it would be more convenient for them. It seems Revd. Fisher's carriage was too heavy for the hilly route and Charles Braine wanted the land bordering the road at Flamank's Orchard. They failed, and today the lane peters out at the field gate shown in Path 8. However, traces remain of it in crop marks; if you go onto Google Earth and look at the field that leads down to Langford Bridge you can clearly see the pattern of the road as it goes through its Z bend in the middle of the field. This is caused by the hardness of the road underneath the soil retaining water differently to the deeper soils around it, which is shown by how the crops grow. Please note that there is no path along the route today.

The 1809 OS map shows a number of interesting things, for example the 'roads' shown then included what we would call lanes today and many of these are linked, however, they are not now because the need for them has disappeared. This was progress, old lanes fell out of use and new roads were built. These new roads were usually built by Turnpike Trusts <sup>3</sup> in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; these were organisations which took over the responsibility for a road, rebuilt it and then charged a toll, a fee, to use the road. The road to Totnes as we see it pass at the top of the village today was built in 1758 to replace the tortuous route along Firestone Lane, past Henley's Cyder Works and then out of Abbotskerswell at the top of the village. Similarly the Newton Abbot to Kingswear Turnpike was built in 1765, creating the road from Decoy to Kingskerswell via Langford Bridge and beyond.



At the bottom of what we now call Priory Road stood this toll house, which was on the Kingswear Turnpike; it is much earlier than the one shown in *1. Industry and Commerce*. Notice the window above the door is blocked up. However, in the second shot on the next page this has been opened up; this photograph was

probably taken in the early 1970s judging by the Mk 1 Ford Transit and the fact that the windows have been boarded up as the last resident, Ann Hart, left around that time. The building has now been demolished in the Decoy road widening scheme.



The intention of our publication is to describe what we can see and walk today, whilst putting these paths in the context of their use over time and telling a few historical tales along the way. New houses, new modes of transport, new employment opportunities all created the need for better roads from the mid-1800s and what we see today is just what happens to exist now; a look at the South Devon Link Road as it cuts through Aller, which used to be in Abbotskerswell Parish, makes this point.



The last days of the Toll House.

## Chapter 2

### Understanding Our Lanes and Footpaths

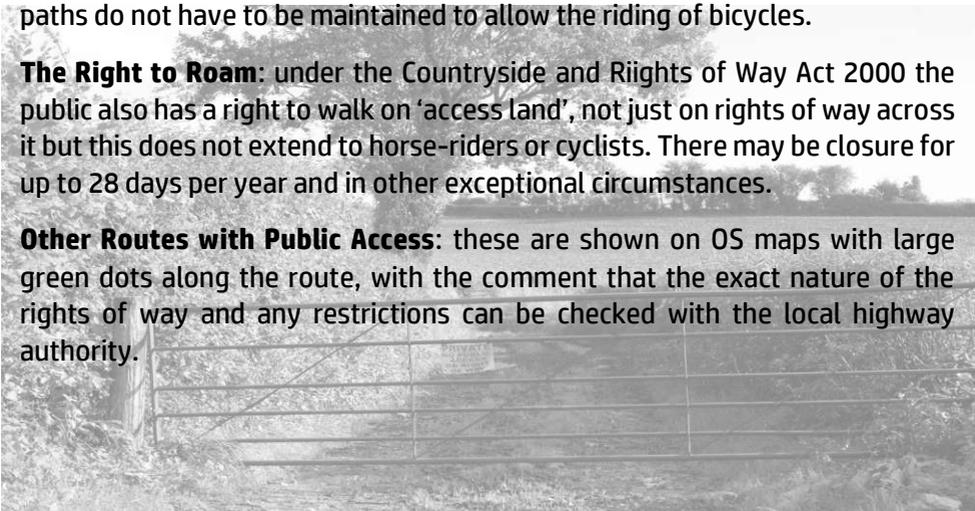
Before describing what can be walked today it is worth explaining how lanes and paths are now designated and what rights the public have to access them. These definitions apply to the lanes that will be described. It is also important that I warn readers of the significance of walking these lanes and paths, particularly when they cross fields. Farmers quite rightly get very angry when walkers damage their crops by cutting across them rather than keeping to the designated footpaths and also by letting dogs off their leashes and letting them worry animals. Also it is important that dog mess is cleared up as it can have a major impact on the health of farm animals.

**A Public Footpath:** when the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 was passed definitive mapping of Rights of Way was undertaken. This is a path on which the public have a legally protected right to travel on foot. Since most footpaths in the countryside are hundreds of years old these paths normally only give the right of way to walkers.

**A Public Bridleway:** these paths also allow the right to ride or lead a horse and since the Countryside Act of 1968 their use by bicycles is permitted, but the paths do not have to be maintained to allow the riding of bicycles.

**The Right to Roam:** under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 the public also has a right to walk on 'access land', not just on rights of way across it but this does not extend to horse-riders or cyclists. There may be closure for up to 28 days per year and in other exceptional circumstances.

**Other Routes with Public Access:** these are shown on OS maps with large green dots along the route, with the comment that the exact nature of the rights of way and any restrictions can be checked with the local highway authority.



## Chapter 3

### The Lanes Described

#### 1. Slade Lane

*Walking Time: 8 minutes*

This is a good place to start because it is a proper footpath which has a real place in the village's history; this is designated as a Public Bridleway. It is also a rather contentious one as exactly where Slade Lane is, is open to some debate. The modern Ordnance Survey Map appears to show the start of Slade Lane at the bottom of Ford Road, whilst in the 1939 version it starts where Manor Road and Priory Road meet; but long term residents of the village would howl at me if I suggested such a thing, therefore I will start the walk outside the building that was formerly the Butchers Arms <sup>4</sup>, where they would suggest it begins.

This was a public house from c1840 until Heavitree Brewery Ltd closed it in 2013 and as you set off the building on the left still shows the lean to that houses a bread oven. On your right is a small stream that rises in the hills that you will walk up; one branch passed through the woods ahead of you which were once part of the Court Grange estate. In the centre of the woods was a fish pond that many older villagers remember fondly as the place where they played in their youth <sup>5</sup>. Here they made rafts and swam, and collected tadpoles and tiddlers. Next to the pond there are still the remains of a pump that provided the water for Court Grange <sup>6</sup> in its early years. Sadly the private property signs stop such activities today.



On the bank of the stream is the intriguing construction shown here, this is Ladewell (the modern spelling is Ladywell). The water from this spring was believed to be special and it was considered to be a Holy Well, one of many in Devon; its special healing properties were said to be the curing of eye infections.

Also close to this spot was a bridge, where Trava now is, that linked to the village cricket ground at Berry Meadow <sup>7</sup>, now under Grange Road's bungalows.



Just beyond this is Lower Lodge, now called Ladywell, which was one of the two lodges for Court Grange and a track wound its way up to the house. As our path heads up the hill, running along the boundary of Grange Copse the limestone bedrock is exposed, showing the strata of the stone. This must have made it difficult for carts, although no doubt since it stopped being used for that purpose much of the loose surface will have been washed away. It turns right at the junction with Path 2 and heads between the fields in a cutting now narrowed by undergrowth. Near the top of the hill, in the field on the right was an old quarry, shown on maps from 1887 until the 1960s when it was finally filled in. It had been used for dumping village waste after 1916<sup>8</sup>.

The path reaches the top of the hill and joins the road from Greatoak Cross to Gulland Cross on the Whiddon Road. Interestingly the OS maps from 1887 to 1944 spell this as Gullen Cross yet by 1960 it had been amended; one wonders who changed it and why?

## **2. Slade Path**

*Walking Time: 4 minutes*

As you walk up the Slade Lane path there is a stile on the left hand side of the path, this is the entrance to Slade Path. It winds its way across the fields to the road from Greatoak Cross to Whiddon Cross, on Whiddon Road.

This is a designated footpath, which is a Devon County Council "Public Right of Way", hence the stile which gives access from the Public Bridleway. You immediately enter an attractive fenced pathway with trees on either side of the path, but watch out as the roots of these trees make walking this part of the path rather precarious. At the end of this path there is a second stile that gives entry to a field across which the path heads slightly to the right. Pass through the gap in the hedge and up to the hedge at the top of the field, where a new metal side gate provides access to the road. The 1904 OS map shows the footpath crossing the road into the field opposite, shown in the photograph on page 9 and then across two fields until it reached Whiddon

Farm. It continued down the farm lane, left on to Whiddon Road and past Whiddon Lodge before turning right to go through the grounds of Whiddon House and on into Whiddon Copse, where there were several paths. Sadly this section is no longer a footpath and much of Whiddon Copse became a quarry.



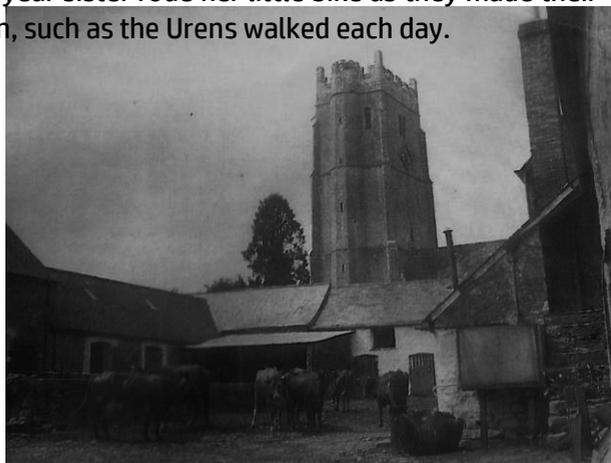
This footpath from Whiddon Farm served another purpose, it led to the Village School. During the 1930s the Stoneycombe Lime and Stone Company<sup>9</sup> built houses at what become known as Stoneyhill <sup>10</sup>. Oddly the 1938 revision of the OS maps calls the hamlet 'Stooly Hill', presumably this was an oral version of the name. The children who lived there only had one way of getting to school in Abbotskerswell in those days, they walked. Down the road, past The Croft and Whiddon Cottages to Whiddon Cross, then up the lane towards Greateak Cross where they would meet the children from Whiddon Farm and join Slade Path and on into the village and to school.

I walked the whole route from Stoneyhill to The School and it took 22 minutes, but that was without playing any games or hurrying in the pouring rain. Villager Ann Wild, nee Low, remembers the trek to school when she started as a five year old. Her father built a seat onto the back of her mother's bicycle for her to ride in, whilst her six year sister rode her little bike as they made their way each day. Other children, such as the Urens walked each day.

### **3. Court Grange**

*Walking Time: 13 minutes*

This walk is in two parts, the original part and the new footpath addition. When Captain Marcus Hare bought the Court Farm estate in 1842, the family lived at what is now the Court Farm Inn <sup>11</sup>.



Although he died in 1845 his wife Lucy continued with their plan to build a house above the village. By 1866 this was complete and a path was laid that linked the centre of the village, around the farm yard, which is clearly shown below, and up the hill to the main drive; it is also in the picture on this publication's rear cover. This would have been necessary for villagers who worked there and also when it was a school for the blind and then the deaf. The path gave the household direct access to the church. With the Farm becoming the Court Farm Inn the barn opposite the church was demolished and is now the driveway into the car park. When Wilton Way <sup>12</sup> was constructed in the 1960s the triangular green was left with the path put at the side of 2 Grange Road.



Much has changed in this part of the village as Court Farm was adapted to become a public house in 1973 <sup>13</sup>. The aerial view of the Farm from the early 1960s clearly shows the path crossing the work needed to build Wilton Way and the new houses along it. Notice the huge barn that stands on what is now the driveway to the car park; the Court Well was just behind this barn and can be seen today on the green, where in wet weather, water is forced through the modern attempt to cap it. The picture of the central courtyard when it was a working farm is splendidly evocative of the days when Abbotskerswell was a working village.

By the 1970s a footpath was created from the entrance to Court Grange along

the western boundary wall of Court Copse and across the fields. Today this is a designated footpath, but be aware that the drive from Court Grange Lane to the Court Grange development is private and not part of the footpath. At the entrance to the path is a lovely old cast iron gate with excellent cast iron gateposts with acorn shaped tops. The path follows the impressive wall and then across the field to a modern 'kissing gate' and then across the next field, up the hill where a second 'kissing gate' gives access to the end of the Wood Lane Bridleway. It is worth noting that there are often cattle in these fields and at the end of the lane is the stream bed described in Path 4.



#### **4. Wood Lane**

*Walking Time: 11 minutes*



This is a lovely example of one of the historic field lanes, allowing access to the fields, as well as joining Court Grange Lane with Whiddon Road, and is known as Wood Lane for its entire length; this is designated as a Public Bridleway.

As the photograph above shows the lane leads off Court Grange Lane by the entrance to Grange Park, which is shown as Court Quarry on the map on page 12. The map is taken from the Sale Catalogue when the Court Grange estate was sold by Leslie Johnson<sup>14</sup> in 1923; the map also shows that Wood Lane was the western boundary of the estate all the way to Whiddon Road. The map also refers to 'old limekilns', one of which is still just visible in the garden of one of the park homes in Grange Park.



To the right, where the houses of The Orchard now stand, this land was called Back Orchard and was part of the old Ruby Farm <sup>17</sup>, now called Monks Thatch. This boundary path follows behind St Marys Close on the left and the gardens of The Orchard, and Rose Bank where it drops down some lovely stone steps on to Odle Hill, where it faces Odle Hill House and the enigmatic building that is Carse Mill (see Appendix) at this point.

## 6. Old Barn

*Walking Time: 10 minutes*

This walk begins on Manor Road outside Henley's Lodge, which was built in c1907 as the works foreman's house; it was called Oakleigh at that time and later Pamval. We walk past the former Henley's Cyder Works <sup>18</sup> and on to Old Barn.



This is a really lovely old piece of village history which, together with the barn at Hennaborough described in Walk 9, is how farmers' barns used to be hundreds of years ago. It is stone fronted and the rest is probably part stone and then finished higher up with traditional cob; this is

clearly seen on the road behind it, , where a large hole reveals both the cob and the thatch underneath the galvanised steel roof that has been added. A lean-to was added to the front with rough cut tree planks as sides. Owned by the Croydons of nearby Higher Langford, it appears to have been disused for decades, although it was used for a barn dance in the 1960s. It has recently been purchased so let us hope some renovation takes place.

Turn up the road behind it and then cross over the Totnes Road, at Oldbarn Cross, which is where the old road from Abbotskerswell to Denbury crossed the new Turnpike Road. This is one of the roads that over the last century has been abandoned and is now just a steep path. It is designated as one of the 'Other Routes with Public Access', but walking under the trees, over the bedrock that makes up the surface and between the high Devon Banks, it is not hard to imagine yourself there in previous times, with a horse and cart slowly coming towards you. Part way up the surface improves as a new road to

been added across the fields. Eventually you reach Rydon Ball Cross where you meet the Ogwell Cross to Denbury road.



There are two World War II related stories around this area. Firstly, behind the houses in the edge of the field is an underground reservoir that the Abbotskerswell Home Guard were designated to guard during the war <sup>19</sup>. The second story involves an American Jeep that a group of lads persuaded a GI to give them a ride in, but it overturned in the rough lane and village lad John Thorning was seriously injured <sup>20</sup>.

Years later the jeep was rescued from the field and re-built by Trevor Pressman from the village; it cost him £15 to buy in the mid-1960s. It was minus wheels and seats, with a broken windscreen and dials, but Trevor and his friend from the village, Andy Cruse, re-wheeled it and dragged it down the lane, pushed it across the road and down the lane to Manor Road where Mr & Mrs Pressman lived. It took Trevor two years working outside, to rebuild it and as the photograph shows, back into working order.

## **7. VICARAGE ROAD**

*Walking Time: 12 minutes in each direction*

This is a lane belonging to the 'other routes' category, beginning with a tarmac road and ending up as a farm track with a stream running down it. Be warned that in wet weather wellington boots are needed in places to avoid some deep puddles.

The walk begins on Stoneman's Hill, just above the Old Post Office <sup>21</sup> as it enters Vicarage Road. On the left is the former Wesleyan Chapel <sup>22</sup>, and it passes two 1960s style bungalows before reaching the old Vicarage <sup>23</sup>. The Vicarage's stables and barns have been turned into a house called Glebe Barns, whilst the Vicarage, now called Glebe House still looks the majestic Georgian house that was built there in 1837. Opposite is the site of Manor Farm <sup>24</sup> and it was here in 1921 that a straw rick, that was being built in its yard, collapsed across the road and the two men working on top ended up in the Vicarage garden. As the road becomes a lane we come to Fairfield <sup>25</sup> which was one of the village's farms from around 1880 until the 1930s. Next door is the 1920s built Fairview, which certainly does have a splendid view down the valley; in

the 1880s Rose Cottage stood here.

A little beyond Fairview the road turns sharply right but the gate straight ahead, shown in the photograph below, marks where the road to Langford Bridge once branched off as described on page 3. Vicarage Road carries on, clearly following the original field boundaries with sharp right angled turns in places. At one place on the lane a gate, now marked “PRIVATE, No Public Access or Right of Way” marks where the lane continued to give access for the farmers; this one obviously does not want visitors. As the lane continues down the hill it becomes Rydon Lane and winds its way down towards the stream and leads to site of the old sewage treatment works<sup>26</sup>. Just before the stream, in the field on the left stood the Rydon Linhay, used when farmers needed shelter for animals and their fodder close by. This was demolished and the stone used in the rebuilding of the Willow Grove barn by Peter Booth. It also seems likely that the village mill<sup>27</sup> stood in the fields on the right where the stream meanders down from the village; this field was called Orchard at Mill Door in 1839.

Where the gate carrying the warning “DANGER Keep Out” now stands, the lane once continued, joining up with Bitney and Yolhey Lanes further up the hill. The building of the sewage works in 1913 seems to have brought an end to this being a through road.



## 8. Hennaborough

*Walking Time: 16 minutes*

This is designated as a public footpath and is well signposted with good gates and stiles, but it is a walk best done in summer or in wellington boots. We begin just before The Priory, in fact opposite the high stone wall of the cemetery where a nice new kissing gate leads into the field. You cross the field, depending on what is growing, as the seven foot high maize crop in the field when I walked this path, made it a bit tricky! A second gate leads into the field next to the remains of Hennaborough Farm<sup>28</sup> with its splendid cob barn, which is all that is left of the farm. Walk down the field and over the stile, across the corner of the field and then down the field until you meet the beginning of Blackball Plantation.



You have two choices here, on this walk you carry on down the hill along the remains of a well-made farm lane, with a cobbled surface that was obviously extensively used over the centuries, emerging at the back of Decoy Park and in to Decoy.

The alternative footpath from the junction takes you through Blackball Plantation; make sure you keep to the left of the various path choices and you will arrive at a stile, with a path up the end of the wood or down through the wood. Both of these pick up the path described in Path 9. This path through the plantation takes 8 minutes from the junction described above.

## 9. Laburnum Terrace

*Walking Time: 20 minutes*

This walk begins on Manor Road with the road that goes up Laburnum Terrace next to Braeside, built by local builder William Beavis in the early 1930s. Laburnum Terrace<sup>29</sup> is a development of Council Houses built in the 1930s and 40s. A footpath leads off from between numbers 10 and 11 and up the field towards Stoneman's Hill just below Crystalwood<sup>30</sup>. The path passes three splendid oak trees that generations of village children probably climbed. At the bottom of this field was The Hams, the village cricket field in the 1960s & 70s<sup>31</sup>; on the 1839 Tithe Map this field was called the Great Ham. At the top of the field admire the view of the village, but let your mind drift back 100 years

to when Henley's Cyder Works, to your right, was in full production and most of the valley below you would have been full of orchards. Next turn left and follow the road 60 yards until opposite Crystalwood, where a stile leads in to a field. Follow the fence until reaching the footpath signs, but there stop and admire the stunning 360° panorama across the village, then Dartmoor, followed by Newton Abbot, the Teign Valley and round to Kingskerswell; this walk is worth it for this spot alone.



Drop down the steep bank to the corner of Blackball Plantation and the stile into the next field, but stop a second and look to your right and see the lovely little lime kiln <sup>32</sup> in the wood, cut into the bank so the loading was from above, with the lime brought from the quarry lower down the hill. This is shown on the 1887 OS map, but not the 1904 one, so may have still been active in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As you walk down the field, the woodland on your right is less than 100 years old. In 1904 the field you are in and the woodland was scrub land and just over the fence was a rifle range; roughly where the large water trough stands were the targets with the butt, an earth bank, behind. During WW1 this would have been an important practice area, the footpath was further away then. At the stile turn left and head down what is now called Magazine Lane (so we know where they stored ammunition) which is another good example of a Devon farm lane. It brings you out onto the Coach Road, its name another clue to what travelled along that route before the Turnpike road was built out of Newton Abbot heading for Totnes.

## **10. Gotem**

*Walking Time: 16 minutes*

On Whiddon Road is Gulland Cross, where the road branches off to the left towards Abbotskerswell. Opposite the junction is a lane which, whilst it is not

a designated footpath, is pleasant walk along an old farm lane, and it should not upset anybody if you want to walk it; it is designated as an “other road, drive, or track”. The photograph shown right is intriguing enough to want to make you walk it. The lane once gave access to around 15 fields and woods, as it heads



towards Rowden Brake which has now been cleared for fields. On the southern edge of the lane was Rowden Covert, the remains of which now borders the 7<sup>th</sup> fairway on Dainton Park Golf course. The use of the words brake and covert are splendid pieces of history in their own right. A brake is a 15<sup>th</sup> century word meaning, as Wiktionary puts it: “a thicket, or an area overgrown with briars”. Whilst a covert, used as a noun, means “an area of thick under-growth where animals hide.” In addition to fields the lane probably gave access to a quarry and lime kiln to the east of the lane, near to which was once the splendidly named Gotem Linhay; the site of this, and its associated woodland, is now on the fairway of the 9<sup>th</sup> hole. The quarry and lime kiln, which were in Gotemhill Wood, are now behind the netting on the 10<sup>th</sup> tee.

The timing allows for the fact that there is no exit at the far end and you will therefore need to walk back to Whiddon Road.

## **11. Bitney Lane**

*Walking Time: 3 minutes in each direction*

Setting off once again from the Butchers Arms, passing Plum Tree Cottage where the Norton family<sup>33</sup> lived for many years, and then just above Brooklands<sup>34</sup> you arrive at Bitney Lane on the left. This is another of those “other routes” leading to new Manor Farm<sup>34</sup> which was built by Michael Buckpitt. The modern OS map shows a route all the way through to Path 12, however, this is no longer passable as it is too overgrown, consequently the track peters out in the farm yard and at the site of Bitney Linhay, which is being extended and made into a house at present. Unlike Rydon Linhay across the valley, Bitney Linhay is not shown on the Tithe Map in 1839, but it does feature on the 1887 OS Map, making it a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century addition, in the field that was called Bitney Landwell.

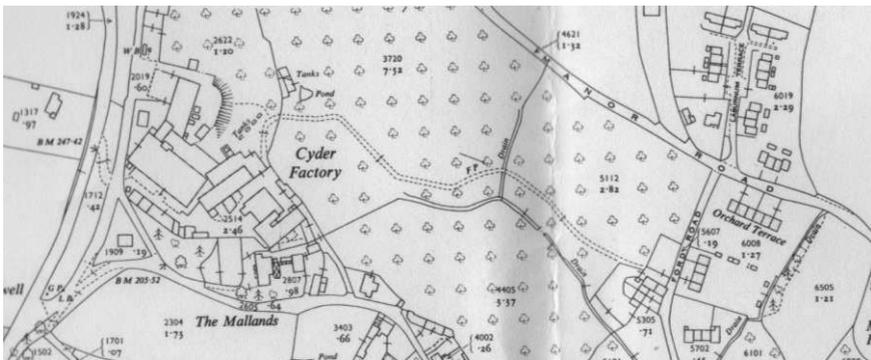
## 12. Yolhey Lane

*Walking Time: 10 minutes in each direction*

If you keep walking up the hill towards Whiddon you soon arrive at the road junction called Greateoak Cross and just beyond that on the left is the entrance to Yolhey Lane which was part of a set of linking farmer's lanes. As with a number of these lanes it is best to walk this one in summer or in wellington boots. Once again this is an "other routes" lane but the OS map is not very up to date in this area as a number of the lanes shown are no longer accessible. Walking down the lane notice it is largely flat and quite well cobbled so was obviously an important access to the fields in this part of the parish. The top part is still used by cars as there are stables and chicken coops part of the way down, but beyond those the lane becomes a real track only used by tractors. It is however a lovely example of the lanes of the area. It turns through 90° but the lane that should go straight on has been filled with branches and is not accessible, so carry on down the lane. Winding down the hill you arrive in a field that has a splendid view across the valley to The Priory, the houses on Priory Lane and the fields below them. The lane should continue to your left but again is no longer passable, but do not try to go down the hill into the farm yard as you cannot get out on to Rydon Lane, so it is necessary to turn round and enjoy the lane all over again.

## Paths that no Longer Exist

As with the old road to Langford Bridge so paths can fall out of use and disappear, or in this case be built upon. The map of 1960 shows an interesting path that went from rear of the Cyder Works through the orchards and reaching Ford Road next to what are now the Abbotswell Cottages.



The purpose of the path was to link Henley's works with their barns on Ford Road; they had been part of Abbotsford Farm which the Henleys had bought. Later the barns were sold and turned into the houses that we see today. Look at the roof line and you can see the evidence of the upper floor windows having been let in to the roof to give more space.

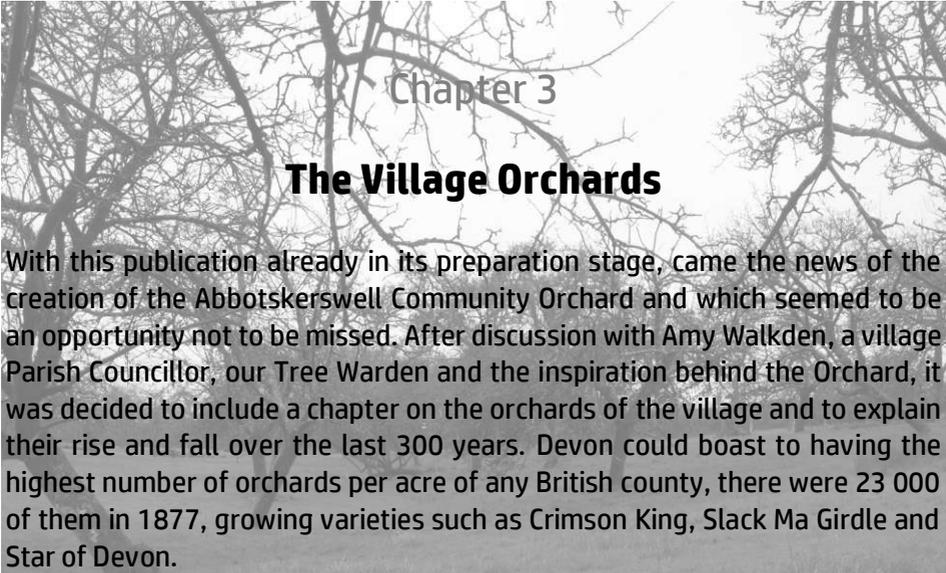
Another lost path was the rear entrance to Court Grange that went from the Lower (now Ladywell) Lodge and curved up to meet what is now the footpath up from Court Farm. This was lost in the building of Grange Road; there are traces of it in the gardens of the bungalows built by Whitehouse Construction in 1980s.

## The AbbPast Trails

If you have enjoyed walking these lanes you might enjoy the two Trails that we devised. They are available on the AbbPast website and are included in our publications. The Diamond Jubilee Village Trail is Chapter 8 in *3. Religion and Education*, whilst The Heritage Lottery Fund Parish Trail can be found in Chapter 8 of *4. Pubs, Clubs and Governance*. They are also on the AbbPast website, [www.abbpast.co.uk](http://www.abbpast.co.uk).



This late 1930s postcard of the village shows the recently constructed houses, then called Orchard Terrace, and also reveals the extent of the orchards that feature in Chapter 3, which tells their story.



## Chapter 3

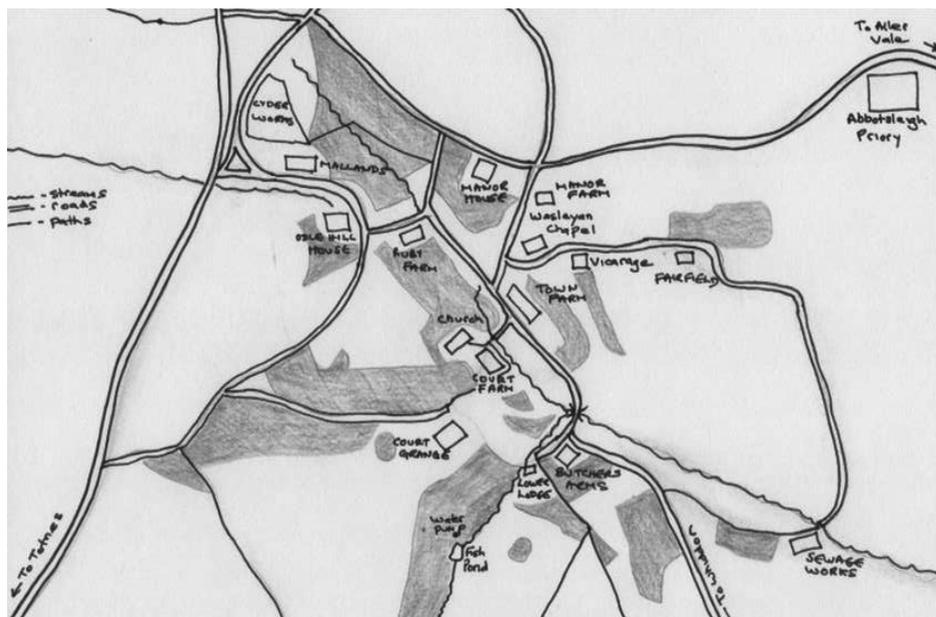
### **The Village Orchards**

With this publication already in its preparation stage, came the news of the creation of the Abbotskerswell Community Orchard and which seemed to be an opportunity not to be missed. After discussion with Amy Walkden, a village Parish Councillor, our Tree Warden and the inspiration behind the Orchard, it was decided to include a chapter on the orchards of the village and to explain their rise and fall over the last 300 years. Devon could boast to having the highest number of orchards per acre of any British county, there were 23 000 of them in 1877, growing varieties such as Crimson King, Slack Ma Girdle and Star of Devon.

A close study of the 1906 Ordnance Survey Map of Abbotskerswell Parish revealed that there were 59 orchards in the village, now there are none. There are a number of reasons for that rise and fall, with the obvious one being the role of Henley's Cyder Works in the village; Henley's Cyder was always spelt with a 'y'. However, cider making for personal consumption began before that in this area. In the days before clean water supplies and tea drinking, British villagers drank ale or cider depending where you lived in the country. Therefore in the medieval times there would have been orchards in Abbotskerswell to provide apples both for food and for cider making. Many households would have made their own and many continued to do so until quite recently. Tony Bowhay describes how they had 48 apple trees in their garden and his grandfather, William Elliott, made cider and always kept barrels and glasses in his barn and friends would call in for a glass during the day. The glasses were never washed as it enhanced the flavour! He had as many as 15 barrels lined up in the hayloft. Pat Honey describes how his grandfather Tom Webber was a ganger on the railway and always carried a flagon of scrumpy with him as he walked up and down his section of track. Pat noted that it may be said of him that "although never drunk, he was addicted and needed a continuous supply to keep him going". Village farm workers, who were a hardy breed, would also have drunk scrumpy during their working day, with their wives and the farmer's wife bringing flagons out especially during the hot and dusty time of harvest; it was often included as part of their 'pay'.

Court Farm had a cider press in its barn which, like many villagers, Mr Elliott used to press his apples. The two village pubs, the Butcher's Arms and the Tradesman's Arms, also had their own orchards and made their own cider, which was sold straight out of the barrels, which were on racks behind the counter. All this meant that there were orchards, and apple trees in most people's gardens.

In 1791 Richard Henley set up a cider works in the village, the original building are still in use today, but as the South Devon Veterinary Hospital. As Henleys grew, the demand for locally grown apples grew with them, as transport was difficult in those days. Consequently when the 1839 Abbotskerswell Tithe Map was created it reflected this development with a remarkable 85 plots described as orchards. There were some great names used: Old Ley Orchard, Machine Orchard, Slade Orchard, Barnland Great Orchard and so on. The growth of Henleys, as told in Chapter 5 of *1. Industry and Commerce*, led to the growth of the village orchards, as by 1887 new buildings had been added and Mallands House built for the Henleys. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a major redevelopment of the site meant the need for even more apples and as the orchards. The map below, with the detail taken from the 1906 OS Map, shows the growth of village orchards, the 1944 map shows exactly the same orchards, whilst the 1960s version shows even more.





This photograph looking across Corn Park, with Sunny Bank, the School and Manor Farm shown, has the orchard just below Court Grange's drive in view in the foreground. Many of the trees on the left are part of the orchards that surrounded The Manor House.

In this 1960s picture, taken in the playground of the school, it shows the school's teachers and behind them the orchards which were where the houses between the shop and Yeoman's Cottage now stand. Mr John Quicke, shown below, was the Headteacher from 1960 to 1977.



Eileen Tett, whose family lived at Rose Cottages, remembers their orchard: “many of the apples were cider apples, but others were Bramleys, Russets, Tom Putts and Cox’s Orange Pippins”. They had over 40 trees in the land behind the cottage and the school. When it was the time for cider apple picking: “Dad just shook the trees violently, and the apples fell down. We gathered them up into hessian sacks, and they were sold to Henley’s Cider Factory near the main road.” Her brothers would take the sacks of apples to the works in a homemade trolley complete with old pram wheels.

Pam Wakeham remembers the orchards very well as she worked in them, and apples were a cash crop to local farmers. The trees were shaken to loosen the apples and long poles used to get at the ones that didn’t fall; it was cold work on frosty days picking the apples off the ground and loading them into the cart. She recalls taking the horse and cart to the cyder works and manoeuvring it onto the weighbridge to weigh it full, and then after emptying, weighing it empty. The building that was the weighbridge office can be seen on the left of the site next to the large shed where the apples were unloaded.



Next she would back the cart into the shed and up to the emptying pit, making certain that the horse behaved. The pit had bars over it and had water in it to float off the leaves and clean the apples; Henley’s did not worry about maggots or insects as they all added to the flavour.

In the 1920s Henley's Vat Houses contained vats that could hold 60 000 gallons of cider and the company was a major employer of villagers. Once again Pat Honey's description of the impact of Henley's is fascinating; his full account can be found on the AbbPast website, in the Community Projects section. He describes how at harvest time whole families worked in the orchards collecting and bagging apples, with the larger children climbing the trees to shake them vigorously and get every apple off them. Mums and smaller children shovelled the fruit off the ground and filled sacks. The large shed that once stood on Manor Road, shown above, was where the sacks, plus the trailer loads brought in by farmers from far and wide, were processed. It took weeks to use all the apples that were stacked in the shed and the more rotten the apples, the better the cider. Next came the pulping, and from there the mash was spread on to sacking in wooden frames by hand and then placed in the press by local women employed as casual labour for the cider making season. There were two large presses in use at the works to get through the operation; one would be pressing and the other one would be loaded ready for pressing.



Villager Jerry Julyan, in the light coloured shirt, is shown at work on the presses in the 1930s.

The mush was emptied into a hole in the floor, from where a conveyor carried it outside where this 'mock' was stock piled; the aroma of the mock was apparent all over the village.

In 1932 Henley's was sold to Henry Whiteway & Co of Whimple, who continued to use the Henley's brand name. Production increased, causing worsening pollution problems in the village's waterways; in 1935 matters came to a head with complaints to the Sanitary Committee of the District Council. Although the Council did not "want to cause the firm any unnecessary inconvenience" it was agreed things had to improve, therefore Whiteways cleaned the stream bed. The Company asked to be allowed to put 1500 gallons of effluent a day into the sewer whilst the cleaning was occurring! New technology was being added, with tanker lorries used to carry 1 800 gallons of cider at a time to the bottling plants. However, with increasing problems with the water authority, the cyder works was closed in 1965 and the purpose for most of the orchards disappeared.

As tastes changed with the prosperity of the 1960s, the number of farm workers decreased and drinking at work became frowned upon. Devon lost 90% of its orchards in the years after 1945. The village's orchards began to disappear under new housing estates; in the 1960s A G Beare (Builders) Ltd were advertising their houses with a "View of Village from 'Manorforde Orchards'", these houses became Forde Close and Manor Close. The orchards belonging to the cyder works had been dense and went all along Manor Road. Odle Hill Grove was built on Machine Orchard and Park and the houses opposite the school on Clarke's Orchard. The rest of the orchards were dismantled, often encouraged by government subsidies to remove unproductive land,



until by the 1980s none were left in Abbotskerswell and just odd trees are left for us to remember this part of the village's history. So for this reason let us all support Amy's work at recreating a small part of the village's past.

## APPENDIX

### Carse Mill

This is one of the strangest buildings in the village, with its angular industrial look and that name. Therefore it is worth taking this opportunity to look into its history. Firstly it is not on the 1839 Tithe Map, there is no building on the site, which is listed as public waste ground, although the rest of Prospect Place is there. Its first documented existence is on the 1886 OS map when it is called Carsevella Cottage; next come mentions in the village Voters Lists when in 1887, 1892 and 1895 Robert Chudleigh was living there and qualifying to vote by owning it; strangely it is listed as Carsville. On 23 April 1898 the East & South Devon Advertiser noted that Carsevella was available for rent, with Robert having gone to live at 1 Town Cottage. By 1908 William George Cowell, a quarryman, was living at Carsevella, in 1919 it was Sam & Ellen Perryman and by 1929 Alfred Richards. What is odd is that at no stage does the house appear in any of the censuses so we cannot get any idea of when it was built. It is possible that it was being called Prospect Place like the other houses in that area, there were 13 of them listed. In 1935 George and Edith Bulley had purchased the house, variously called Carsevella or Carsevilla. It was at this time that the road outside it became known as Bulleys Corner and they lived there until the 1960s. Following them were Mr & Mrs Peter Judd who appear to have named it Carse Mill, the first recorded use of this name; apparently it had been called Rose Cottage and he felt that this was an inappropriate name.



The question remains what was this building? Firstly it should be noted that nowhere is there any kind of reference to a mill within the village; there was probably one in earlier times, further down the valley as referred to on page 15. If this had been a mill, of any kind, it would have been listed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Trade Directories, or in the Devon list of mills or in the census, but it is not. Also the source of water which now appears through the wall across the road is far too unreliable and inconvenient. It has been suggested that a launder could have been put across the road, but this would have blocked the main road into the village, so seems unlikely.

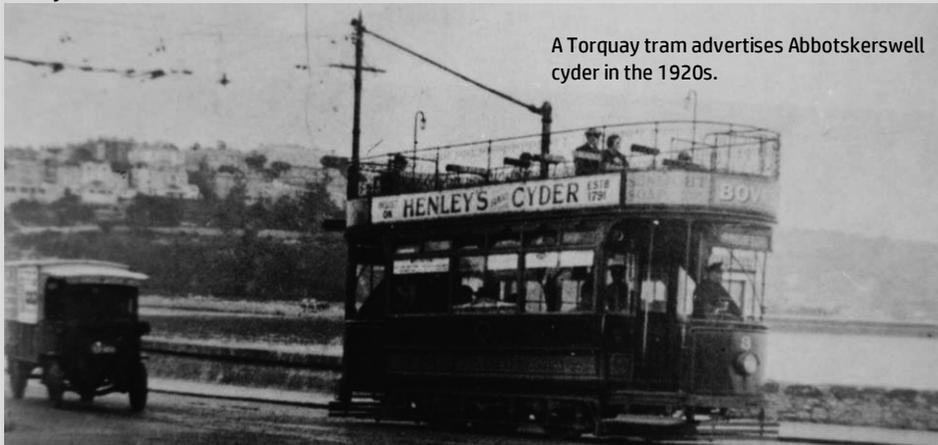
I am inclined to this explanation for its construction. In 1862 Edward Palk a butcher who lived at Laburnum Farm bought Odle Hill House and also appears to have acquired Odle Hill Cottage since his son Edward was living there in 1871. Is it perhaps likely that the industrial look of the building was because it was built by them for their butchery business, with a small living area which is linked to the road by a ramp. The Palk's had an abattoir in that area of the village as in the 1910s there were complaints about the blood getting into the open gutter that ran down the side of the road from that part of the village. It is not clear which buildings housed the abattoir; it could have been the barns behind Odle Hill House or those at Westbury or was it at Carsevella. I think it possible that the building was actually used to hang the meat from the carcasses.

## ABBOTSKERSWELL VILLAGE HISTORY SERIES REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> *Religion and Education* Page 8 & *Houses and Families* Pages 29-30  
<sup>2</sup> *Abbotsleigh Priory 1861-2018* Page 23  
<sup>3</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 9-10  
<sup>4</sup> *Pubs, Clubs and Governance* Pages 8-11  
<sup>5</sup> *The Era of World War II* Pages 104-105  
<sup>6</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 40-60  
<sup>7</sup> *Pubs, Clubs and Governance* Pages 25-29  
<sup>8</sup> *Houses and Families* Page 25  
<sup>9</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 99-101  
<sup>10</sup> *Houses and Families* Page 13  
<sup>11</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 40-41 & *Industry and Commerce* Page 17  
<sup>12</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 13-16  
<sup>13</sup> *Pubs, Clubs and Governance* Pages 13-14  
<sup>14</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 52-54  
<sup>15</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Page 27  
<sup>16</sup> *Religion and Education* Chapters 3 & 6  
<sup>17</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 22-23  
<sup>18</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 48-57  
<sup>19</sup> *The Era of World War II* Pages 81-87  
<sup>20</sup> *The Era of World War II* Pages 79-80  
<sup>21</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 65-68  
<sup>22</sup> *Religion and Education* Pages 29-33  
<sup>23</sup> *Religion and Education* Pages 49-51  
<sup>24</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 18-21  
<sup>25</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Page 24  
<sup>26</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 21-22  
<sup>27</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 6-7  
<sup>28</sup> *Religion and Education* Page 20  
<sup>29</sup> *Houses and Families* Pages 11-12  
<sup>30</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 72-73  
<sup>31</sup> *Pubs, Clubs and Governance* Pages 28-29  
<sup>32</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Pages 1 & 31-32  
<sup>33</sup> *Abbotskerswell During World War 1* Pages 13 & 45-46  
<sup>34</sup> *Industry and Commerce* Page 21

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A Torquay tram advertises Abbotskerswell cyder in the 1920s.