

TICKHILL'S LANES AND HEDGEROWS

A talk by Tony Sheridan to the Tickhill and District Local History Society in
September 2006

Until the Second World War, Tickhill was surrounded by an extensive network of ancient lanes and hedges. Since then, the drive for agricultural production has meant that over three quarters of the hedgerows and even some of the lanes have been removed. However, previous work by the Tickhill Historical Society has recorded the field names and their boundaries and this, together with other sources and a survey of what remains gives an interesting slant on the history of agriculture around Tickhill.

Tickhill is a Norman-founded town that did not exist before the Conquest but there were two centres of habitation in the village of Dadesley to the northwest and the hamlet of Lindrick to the south. Figure 1 shows a modern map of Tickhill, but the course of the old lanes to these two centres can still clearly be seen.



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The castle was built as a motte and bailey immediately after the Conquest; its rebuilding in stone and the establishment of the town followed at the beginning of the 13th century. Figure 2 shows the Norman grid plan of Tickhill, which is superimposed on the old lanes but has little effect on them. These lanes are flanked by many of the best remaining hedgerows and many of their names reflect their Anglo-Saxon or Danish origins, including Wong Lane, Wilsic Lane, Wellingley Lane, Lindrick Lane and Hindley Lane.



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The geology of the area is also important. Tickhill itself and the areas to the west are on the magnesian limestone belt, which is mainly heavy clay on Dolomitic limestone. In mediaeval times it was not possible to plough this land and it was used mainly as pasture for grazing. Hedges were therefore needed to contain the livestock and this area, the North and South Wongs contains the oldest hedges in Tickhill – wong or wang is the Anglian word for grassland, hence also Wetwang (water meadow) in East Yorkshire. There is a method for establishing the approximate age of hedgerows by counting the number of species in each 30m length – the age approximates to one hundred years for the average number of species less one. Although this rule of thumb is less accurate for limestone areas, it does suggest that many of the hedges to the west date from before the conquest. The range of hedgerow species contains some that are now relatively scarce including spindle, wild service and wild berberis, which is at its northern limit in Britain. Also, many of the remaining wild flower species survive close to these hedges.

The low lying warp land to the east, which used to flood each winter, and the sand beyond the Spital were the sites of the Low and High Commons respectively. Open grazing on these areas ended with the Enclosure Acts, which required all boundaries of awarded plots to be enclosed by quickthorn hedges. These hedges can therefore be expected to date from shortly after 1776 and the number of species in Great Black Lane and Water Lane correlates well with an age of a little over 200 years; hawthorn still heavily predominates. This approximate method of dating hedges will soon be of little value as most new planting or ‘gapping-up’ is done with a variety of species.

The great loss of hedgerows is due to a combination of factors:

- mechanisation that makes large fields more economic
- government grants for the removal of hedges
- maintenance costs coupled with the fact that hedges are of little use on arable land (unless the soil is very light and subject to wind blow)
- invention of the electric fence which is cheaper and more flexible for the retention of livestock
- improved drainage including the scouring of the banks of ditches and channels.

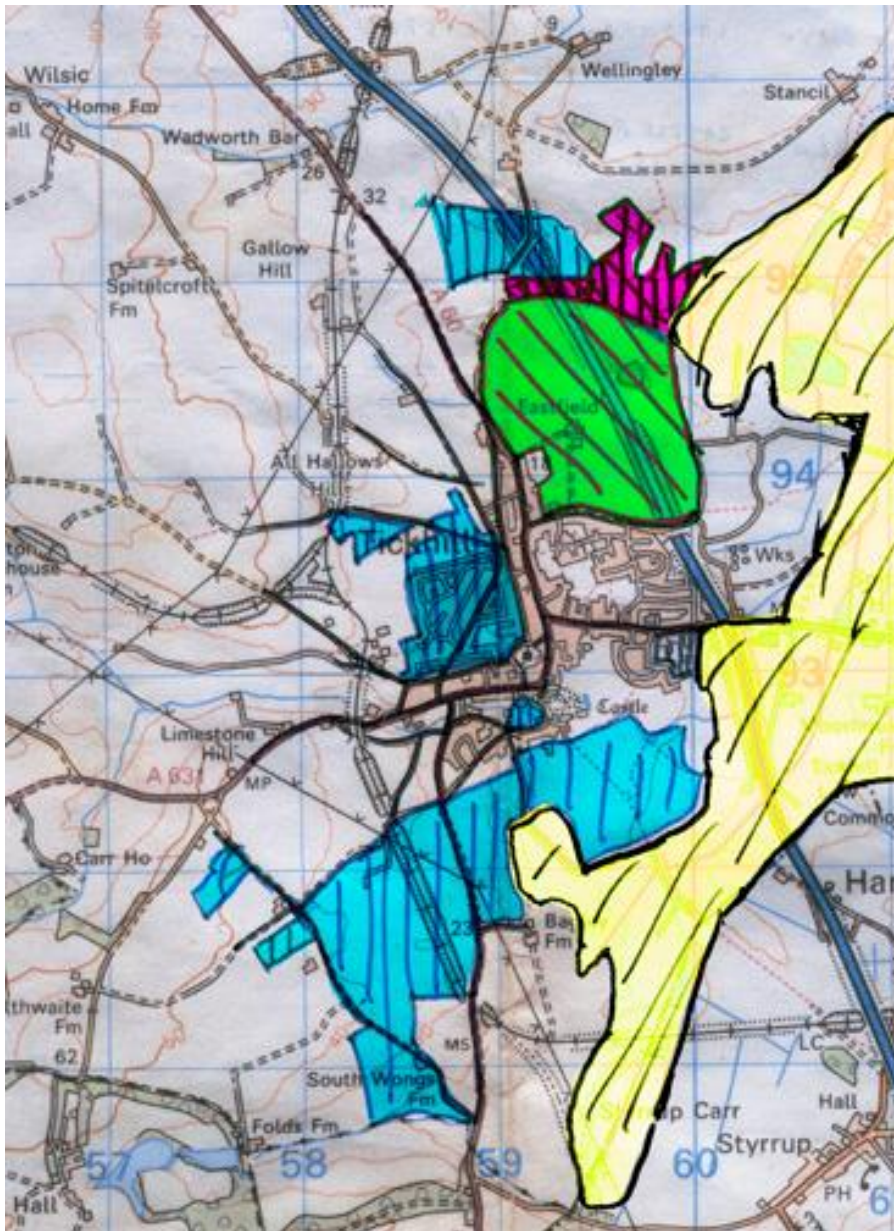
However, looking to the future, the change of the EEC Agricultural Policy from subsidising production to subsidising conservation could throw a lifeline to hedgerows as their maintenance or replanting is part of the requirements for the lower and higher level environmental grants.

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council instigated a desk study, based on old maps, of field boundaries and hedgerows in the borough (existing before 1745), with a view to applying for a degree of protection. This was mainly triggered by prospective development of land around Robin Hood Airport and new link roads to the M18 and these areas were their priority. However they asked for help in other areas and Tickhill Local History Group was asked to seek out available maps of Tickhill parish before 1745, which showed hedgerows or field boundaries with an indication that hedgerows were established. A small project team was formed of Keith Goodchild, Donald Thorpe and Tony Sheridan as co-ordinator.

The following maps were located and drawn to the attention of DMBC:

- The Enclosure Award maps of 1765-6 and the Thomas Amory farm map, both in DMBC archives on King Edward Road
- The Laughton Map of the Eastfield estate of 1842, in the Museum
- The Castle Fields maps of 1648-53, in the archives of Sandbeck Hall, with a short summary by T W Beastall in Tickhill library.

Between them, these maps cover over 60% of the area of Tickhill Parish and most of the lanes, see Figure 3.



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Key:-

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|--------|-----------------------------|
| Blue | Castle Fields Map 1648 – 93 |
| Green | Laughton Map 1742 |
| Yellow | Enclosures Acts 1765 – 6 |
| Red | Thos. Amory Farm Map 1825 |

The team also carried out a survey of which hedges remained in the areas covered by the above maps. This gave an immediate benefit as DMBC announced the availability of a limited number of EEC based grants for the re-establishment of hedgerows where they provided a visual amenity and also connected areas of good wildlife habitat to provide wildlife corridors. The information gathered was used to prepare for David Brookfield of Stoney Brigg Farm a case to apply for the free planting of hedges on Friars Lane, Green Lane and Crooked Lane Head. These were shown on the Castle Fields map and connect the area around Paper Mill Dyke, the railway and the Friary to the west of Tickhill with Castle Fields and the Castle to the south. The proposed hedges also bound the areas newly provided for Tickhill Juniors football pitches. The application was successful and the hedges have been planted by DMBC.

DMBC has since completed a full survey of remaining hedgerows in the borough, based on recent aerial surveys. It is hoped that this will have recorded a nadir in the evolution of hedges and all the wildlife that depends on them, so that future surveys will at last record an improvement.