

History in a hedgerow at Apy Hill Lane

In 1982 a hedgerow survey was carried out in Tickhill by Doncaster MBC Planning Department and the Museums Service. This was one of two such surveys in Doncaster Metropolitan Borough, the other being in the contrasting area of Fishlake. One of the reasons for the surveys was concern about the loss of hedgerows as farmers removed them in order to have much larger fields for their crops. In 1980 there were 347 fields in Tickhill parish compared with 1469 fields in 1848. The survey examined 30-yard sample lengths in a total of 121 hedgerows in Tickhill and recorded the shrubs and tree species in each sample length. Using a formula developed in the 1970s it was possible to estimate the age of hedgerows according to the number of species there. The hedgerow with the largest number of species - 9 in a 30-yard stretch - was at Apy Hill Lane, suggesting that the hedgerow was c. 875 years old, from about the 12th Century. The hedgerow is the oldest in Tickhill parish.

At least two of the species found in the hedgerow at Apy Hill Lane are regionally rare:

- **Barberry (*Berberis vulgaris*)**
This deciduous shrub, first noted in this location by Thomas Tofield in 1785, is only found growing wild in Apy Hill Lane in the Doncaster MBC area. It has been known in the Tickhill area longer than anywhere else in the north of England.
- **Chequer or wild service tree (*Sorbus torminalis*)**
This tree was also noted by Thomas Tofield. Yorkshire is the furthest north in the UK that this tree grows. Chequer trees (after which Chequer Road in Doncaster was named) have edible fruit originally called chequers. The bark has a pattern of cracked square plates and the leaves (see right) are similar to those on maple trees. A specimen of this tree can be seen in the grounds to the left of Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery.



Another rare plant has also been found growing below the hedgerow in Apy Hill Lane: field garlic (*Allium oleraceum*), a member of the onion family. It only survives in one other site in the Doncaster district. Dr John Hodgson of the University of Sheffield's Unit of Comparative Plant Ecology states 'Its presence in Tickhill may be regarded as symptomatic of the ancient vegetation of the Tickhill locality'.

As well as data found in the 1982 survey, Dr Colin Howes (then Environmental Records Officer at Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery) described a visit to Apy Hill Lane on 20 September 1986 when he saw a chequer tree growing with wild barberry, dogwood, field maple, hazel, holly, plum, spindle and other trees in a hedgerow of the sunken droveway along Apy Hill Lane. Howes called this a 'truly remarkable living assemblage' which with associated archaeological features 'demonstrated this hedge bank to be in the region of 1000 years old'. The trees now have a Tree Preservation Order.



Apy Hill Lane was the ancient route westwards from Tickhill to Braithwell from where the route went north west to Conisbrough. Charles Hippisley-Cox believes the name Apy is derived from the practice of bee keeping by Tickhill's friars, the lane leading from just north of the friary to the area where they possibly kept their bees for honey (fermented it helped to produce mead) and beeswax (for candles). The eastern end of the lane, shown left crossed by a railway bridge, has been identified as a sunken droveway as noted above.

Drove roads were from 40 feet (12m) to 90 feet (27m) wide to allow for the passage of large herds of as many as 300-400 animals. Apy Hill Lane's single carriageway has wide verges in front of the steep banks, but overall not quite as wide as 40 feet. It is possible that the lane predates the medieval period.

Much remains to be discovered about the archaeology of Apy Hill Lane to supplement the evidence of the hedgerow. So far, a 15th Century gold ring has been found there (now in Doncaster Museum) with the inscription 'I beit ye teim' meaning 'I bide the time'. It possibly belonged to a woman of high status and was lost shortly after it was given, as there is little sign of wear. It was possibly a wedding ring.

The information about the Apy Hill Lane hedgerow became critical in 1988 when it was used at a Public Inquiry when a developer appealed against Tickhill Council's refusal to accept a planning application for a residential development

on just over 7 acres of land between Apy Hill Lane and Stoney Lane. The appeal was rejected. However, the hedgerow at the junction with Stoney Lane, shown right in March 1988 with Charles Hippisley-Cox in the gateway, had been removed before the Public Inquiry and replaced with a wood fence. (Photograph courtesy of Colin Howes.)



Howes, C.A., *Friars' Hill Public Inquiry: Proof of evidence*, Museums and Arts Service, Doncaster MBC, 1988.

Howes, Colin, 'Who put the Chequer in Chequer Road?' In Hill C., (ed.) *Yesterday Today*, Issue No. 41, August 2003, pages 38-47.

For the gold ring see website www.heritagedoncaster.org.uk and search for Tickhill then look under Archaeology.