

**A Ladybird Guide to Hedgerow History –
or some sweeping generalisations about fields!**

What can field boundaries tell us about the changing landscape?

- Usually field boundaries enclose land to make a stock proof boundary and are therefore bound up in the agricultural economy, indicating the changing fortunes of farming and methods of production.
- They may also indicate territorial boundaries – parish boundaries are often enshrined in hedgerows with individual trees marked out on early Ordnance Survey maps.
- Estates may have used field boundaries as a visual signature of their territory.

Enclosure

The process of enclosure can take various forms but can be broadly divided into two:

- Piecemeal enclosure – a gradual process of taking in land by private agreements. It usually demonstrates a field pattern which is more irregular with sinuous field boundaries with tell-tale dog-legs or kinks.
- General enclosure – a process involving the whole community of proprietors acting in concert. This is taken to the ultimate extreme by parliamentary enclosure which began in the early 17th century and peaked in the 1760s and 1770s. This is often characterised by straight field boundaries with large squarish fields.

Fields through History

Early fields of Bronze Age date (c2000 – 750 BC) have been recognised in various part of the country, notably Dartmoor and other upland areas, often recognised as low stone walls. Prehistoric (Bronze Age) field systems in Wales have been identified at St. David's and Ramsey Island.

Roman fields were laid out in a very regular fields relating to the Roman units of measurement . Possible example at Treventy where the division of land is 700 metres square – *Centuriation* was laid out to a grid of square enclosures whose sides each measured 20 actus the equivalent of 710 metres.

Medieval fields – fields farmed in common – strips 22 yards wide and 220 or one furlong long within large enclosures. Ploughing with oxen required a large turning circle which often left a reverse S-shape. These strips became fossilised when numbers of strips became amalgamated and enclosed by a stock proof boundary. Examples may be seen at Felindre, Llangadog.

Late Medieval – Early Modern enclosure often took the form of more general enclosure -more unified and regular fields laid out in a systematic manner.



Chwilota'r Tywi! **Exploration Tywi!**



How hedgerows came into existence

Woodland Relic Hedges - the management of strips of woodland vegetation around assarts.

Planted Hedges – planted either with a single species or multi species.

Dating of Hedgerows

In the 1970's Max Hooper and Ernest Pollard looked at the variations of species in hedgerows and concluded that the hedge's age and the number of species it contained appeared to be related:

Hooper's Hypothesis

In 30 yards of hedge = (no of woody species x 110) plus 30 years

In a thirty metre stretch of hedge there is one new species every hundred years

Therefore a 2 species hedge would be 250 years old.

This hypothesis was qualified with a warning that it could be out by as much as 200 years either way.

In the light of later research it is recognised that this formula is rather too simplistic. Broadly older hedgerows do have more species than younger hedges. However hedges may have been planted with a variety of species from adjacent woodland, also soil type and hedgerow management will also impact on the number of species which are favoured.

Whilst looking at species numbers to provide an absolute date may be erroneous radical differences in the composition of adjacent hedgerows can suggest a relative chronology and indicate reorganisations in the landscape. Particularly when other evidence is taken into consideration, looking at documentary records, physical boundary traits, field pattern and character and landscape context.

Hedgerow features to look out for

- Fruiting trees such as apple, plum or damson or an ornamental variety such as privet, box or laburnum may indicate a garden or enclosure for a cottage.
- Particular species may repeat in the hedgerow indicating a planting pattern.
- Do roads/railways appear to 'cut across' field boundaries? Dates of toll roads and railways can provide a chronology.
- Field names on the Tithe map may indicate land use and offer clues to the date of the field pattern.
- Do other field boundaries respect or butt up to a boundary? This may indicate a boundary of some significance and antiquity.
- Standards – trees left to grow naturally for 80 – 100 years when they could be harvested and used for timber. Timber was a very valuable commodity. Prior to the 19th century they would have been pollarded – cut at a height of around 2-3 metres. Pollards might provide an important fodder crop – 'leafy hay'.
- What is the construction of the physical boundary (ie a bank or ditch) and how does it compare to those adjacent?

Rhan ariannwyd Tywi Afon yr Oesoedd gan Gronfa Treftadaeth y Loteri, Cyngor Cefn Gwlad, Cynllun Datblygu Gwledig, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, Cyngor Sir Gar ac mewn da gan Yr Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol.

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