

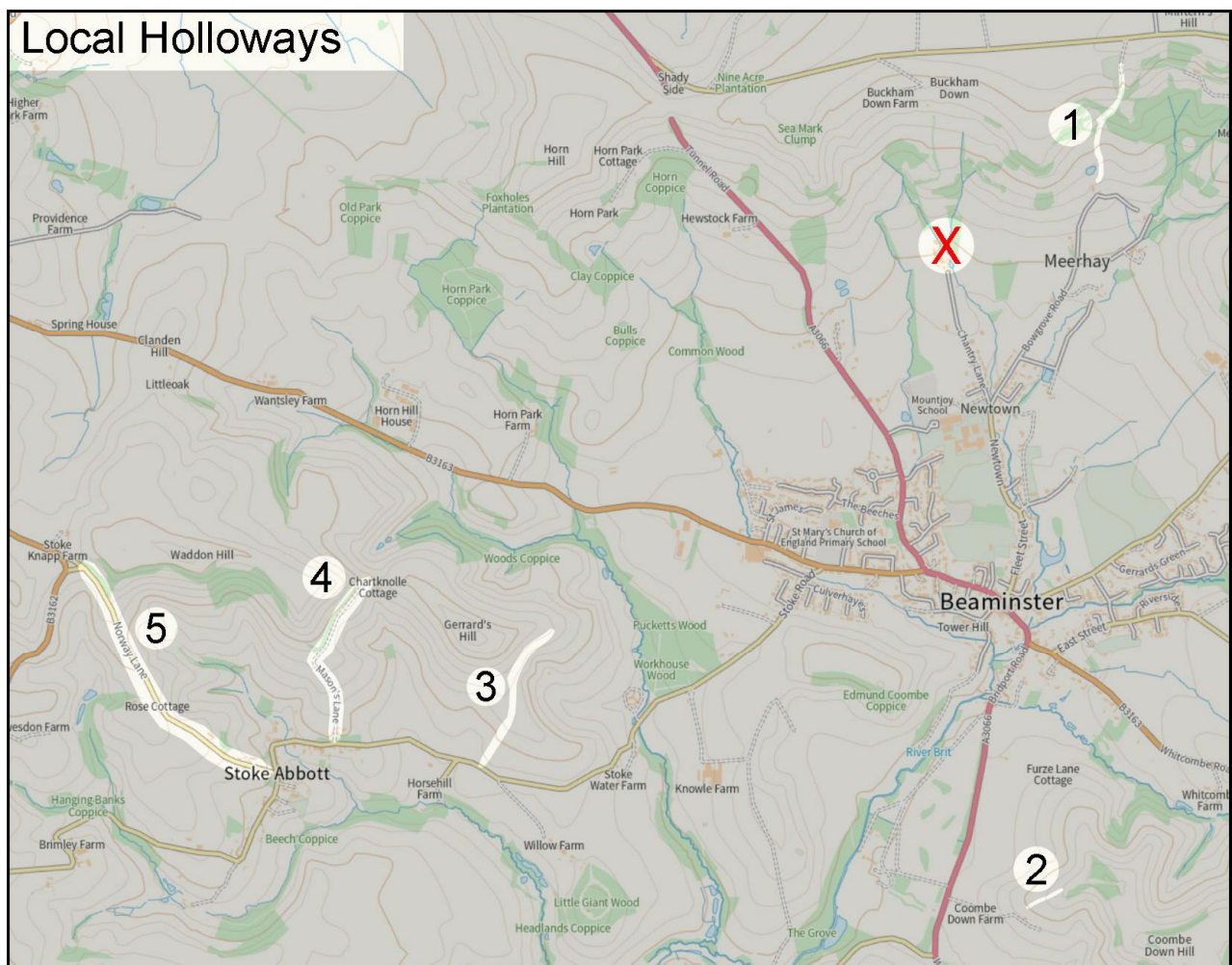
## Observations on local Holloways in the context of Bridleway 80

(Extract from Definitive Statement for the parish of Beaminster (W21) Bridleway 80:

*478026 474048 Chantry Farm via Buckham Down to South Perrott parish boundary)*

West Dorset has a significant number of routes that satisfy the academic criteria for a route to be considered a Sunken Lane (Holloway), these being that the surface be at least 2 metres wide and sunken by at least 0.5 metres below the adjoining land. The most cited examples, in Dorset, are Shute's Lane and Hell Lane<sup>1</sup>, an unpaved, unclassified country road between Symondsburys and North Chideock.

Local to Beaminster there are several good examples, annotated on the map extract below, and described thereafter, the nearest being Stinford Lane (1), 600 metres to the west of Bridleway 80. (X)



(Annotated map extract from Dorset Explorer, background map 'OS Roads')

<sup>1</sup> E.g. <https://www.countryfile.com/go-outdoors/days-out/shutes-lane-and-hell-lane-dorset>

## 1. Stinford / Stintford Lane

Status: unmade, unclassified country road.

Length (Sunken): 460 m

Grid references: ST 48497 03448 to ST 48386 02866

Geology: Various (See Appendix B<sup>(R)</sup>)



Linking Meerhay to Beaminster Down Road.

Historically this would have been a well-used route giving access to series of chalk pits which when they fell into disuse became the town's landfill site, it was subsequently landscaped and converted into Buckham Down picnic area.

Photographs<sup>2</sup> suggest that for a few years around 1930 it was used as a hill climb section on the Motorcycling Club (MCC) London to Exeter Trial.

The harder underlying geology results in sloped banks rather than the near vertical sides that occur in the more friable sandstone.

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## 2. Combe Down

Status: Bridleway (W21/52)

Length (Sunken): 80 m

Grid references: ST 48208 00642 to ST 48472 00266

Geology: Sandstone.



*The thumb-stick in the foreground of the photograph is 1.3 metres.*

A short section of Holloway on Beaminster bridleway 52 which links the A3066 to the road at Mapperton, is almost certainly an historic route. Locally the Posy Tree that used to be at the junction between the bridleway and the road at Mapperton, was said to be the meeting place on the funeral route out to South Warren Hill during the plague when victims could not be taken for burial in the churchyard at Netherbury.

<sup>2</sup> <https://austinharris.co.uk/photo/riley-nine-on-1929-mcc-london-to-exeter-trial/3929/>

Being too narrow for modern tractors the farm traffic now uses an alternate track a few metres to the south, as a result the characteristic flat bottom (Gerrard's Hill) has softened due to erosion material from the sides falling in.

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### 3. Gerrard's Hill

Status: undefined – agricultural access.

Length (Sunken): 350 m

Grid references: ST 46348 01259 to ST 46063

00701

Geology: Sandstone

This “blind lane” \* unpaved track gives agricultural access to fields between adjoining landholdings. Currently of no recorded status, signage at the time of the site visit, at each end implies pedestrian access is permitted but dogs must be on leads.



\*Blind Lanes are a feature of the local landscape and appear to originate from the historic nature of the ownership in West Dorset where landholdings were often made up of non-contiguous clusters of small fields necessitating communal access routes to a field or fields that would otherwise be “landlocked”. (See Appendix F<sup>(R)</sup>)

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### 4. Mason's Lane (Stoke Abbot, Bridleway 3)

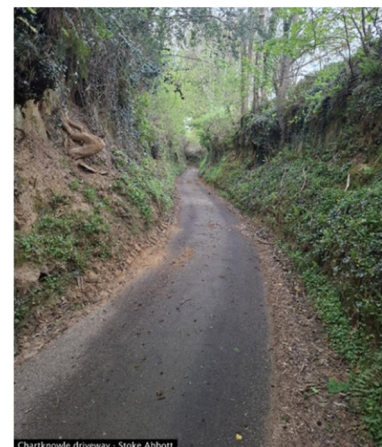
Status: Bridleway (W43/3)

Length (Sunken): 340 m

Grid references: ST 45616 01387 to ST 45446 01124

Geology: Sandstone.

A surfaced private roadway giving access to a private residence, Chartknolle Cottage, formerly Chart Knolle Farm.



## 5. Norway Lane

Status: Metalled Public Highway.

Length (Sunken): 900 m

Grid references: ST 44483 01501 to ST 45278 00687

Geology: Sandstone.

Now part of the surfaced road network linking Stoke Abbott to B3162 at Stoke Knapp Farm.

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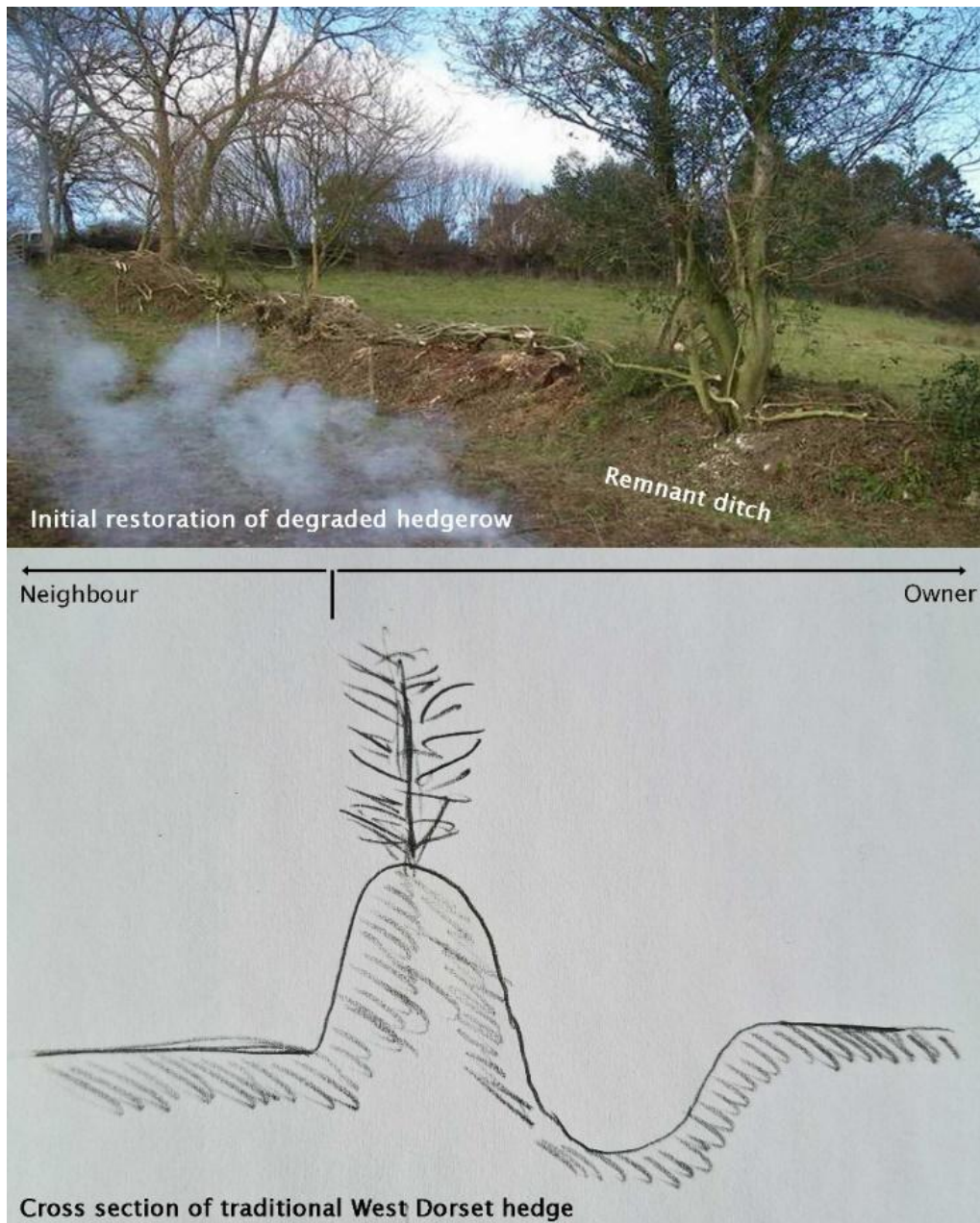


### Track between banks / hedgerows.

Superficially these common landscape features are similar to Sunken Lanes in appearance, but their origin is unrelated to the process that gives rise to Sunken Lanes. They are a man-made feature which arises because of construction of the traditional West Dorset hedgerow which comprises a hedge atop a bank. Construction starts by excavating a ditch to throw up a bank. The bank is supplemented with stone scavenged from the adjoining field. Hedging plants, e.g. Hazel, Hawthorn & Blackthorn, etc. and a few Standards (trees), e.g. Oak, Ash, etc. are planted on top. (See sketch)

The hedge is kept stock proof and in good condition by laying on a 7-10 year cycle. An unusual feature of this type of hedge is that the ditch is also maintained by throwing up any infill on to the top of the bank. When the ditch is also a drainage ditch this can result in banks growing to a considerable height as many of these hedgerows date back centuries. Custom is that, for boundary hedgerows, the ditch is dug on the owner's side. So, where a track runs between two holdings a lane between banks can be created.

Maintaining these hedgerows in good order is labour intensive and as manual labour in agriculture has been replaced by mechanisation most have fallen into a state of disrepair. An unmaintained hedgerow will become a row of scrubby trees which then start dying off leaving a unevenly spaced row of trees surviving.



**SKETCH AND PHOTOGRAPHS [TAKEN 11<sup>TH</sup> TO 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2025] BY RICHARD MEATYARD**