

## TAMAR VALLEY SIGNIFICANT HEDGE SURVEY

Over the past few months the Cordiale team at the Tamar Valley AONB have been watching our historic hedgerows emerge from their winter clothes and spring into life with swathes of bright daffodils, and now blossom and buds. We've also been gathering volunteers interested in our hedgerow survey and during April we held two training sessions for them. We had almost 40 people in total attend a full day's training each at Buckland Abbey and at the Tamar Valley Centre, helped out by local ecologists Anne Harvey and Martin Summers. The informal day comprised short talks about the history of boundaries in Devon and Cornwall – expertly delivered by local volunteer Dave Williams; analysing documentary sources; and hedge management, followed by hands-on workshops including a very challenging (for some!) game of flower and leaf Snap! Braving the April showers the volunteers were then taken to a nearby site and started to use and question our survey methodology, guided again by our expert ecologists and the Cordiale team from the AONB. The training days were deemed a success, and we were really thrilled to have such a great response from local people from all different backgrounds and with different levels of knowledge. The volunteers have now been split into Parish groups - Bere Ferrers, Buckland Monachorum, Calstock and St Dominick - and will undertake the surveys across the Tamar Valley throughout the summer, supported by the Cordiale team. The surveys will collect ecological and archaeological information and to begin to assess the contribution hedges can make as sustainable woodfuel.



Ecologist Anne Harvey and the AONB's Simon Bates identifying species at Buckland Abbey  
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### Historic hedges

Field boundaries can tell us much about the development of our surroundings, but perhaps most obviously changes in agricultural and horticultural methods. As well as defining ownership and providing weather protection, boundaries such as hedges can give an indication of the general health of the environment through their floral and faunal population – the healthier the hedge the greater the biodiversity it will support - and have historically been a source of food and fuel. There is a range of different boundary types in Devon and Cornwall and hedgebanks are a familiar feature of the local landscape. Some boundaries can be very old where many of the ancient field systems have remained unchanged.

The shape, form and age of a hedge or boundary can give an indication of historic land use and development, and provide tangible evidence of how early societies functioned. Their form and make-up can help to date them, as dating by other formulaic means can prove to be problematical and inaccurate. In Cornwall the earliest fields were formed by curved stone banks like those at Middle Bronze Age settlements, such as Leskernick on Bodmin Moor. Reorganisation of the landscape in the Bronze Age, possibly as a way of ensuring sustainability, led to 'celtic' fields, typified by small irregular enclosures with boundaries of stone and earth banks.

Larger strip enclosures with sinuous borders like those around Harrowbarrow indicate the enclosure of earlier open field systems commonly found clustered around small settlements. Strip enclosures are often in multiples of 220 chains (one furlong) in length, suggesting that their setting-out was carefully managed. Other fields characterised by an irregular shape, particularly

those adjacent to woodland, may indicate old assart boundaries; the remains of trees and shrubs cleared for agricultural land. These boundaries are particularly species-rich and can reflect the age of surrounding woodland.

The inclusion of slow-colonising woodland species in hedges bordering tracks and roads give an indication of their maturity and therefore possibly mark ancient routes. Fields created as a result of the Enclosures Acts - generally between 1750 and 1860 - are typified by long straight borders with thin hedges of low species diversity. Historic mapping, particularly the Tithe surveys of the 1830s and 40s, can also provide information about land use, ownership and boundaries.

### Food and fuel

Hedge management has long been an important practice in the rural landscape, to ensure they remain animal-proof, and historically to provide wood for tool-making, wattle for building, pea sticks for crop growing, and firewood and winter fodder. This resource was maximised in a sustainable way using various techniques:

Coppicing: cutting shrubs and trees back to their bases according to an established cycle, creating long straight timber poles which can be used as fuel or for a variety of other uses. Although coppicing is rarely performed on a regular basis today, many hedges across the four parishes retain evidence of this past management, such as multiple stemmed boles. Coppicing provided such an important resource that law protected it both by precedent and statute.

Pollarding: a form of coppicing where the tree is cut higher up, so that new growth is out of reach of grazing animals. New shoots produce light timber from the crown of the pollarded trunk.

The many small fields in our area are important to the character of the valley, but conversely many fields mean many hedges, all of which require maintenance and management. The maintenance of hedges, other than by annual flailing, is now considered to be unprofitable, principally due to cheap oil.

### Surveys

The Cordiale significant hedges survey will involve an analysis of primary sources followed by fieldwork, with the resulting data providing an evidence base for informed management. The geographical, geological and topological nature of the four parishes along with any relevant socio-economic factors that may have brought about landscape changes will also be taken into account.

Whilst we have now delivered the training we are still looking for keen volunteers from across the Tamar Valley. We will of course fill in new volunteers with all you need to know, but you will also be able to gain or brush up on skills as we will be holding some follow-up events in plant species identification (and more!) in the coming months. Contact Samantha Barnes or Simon Bates at the Tamar Valley Centre if you want to join in: [sbates@tamarvalley.org.uk](mailto:sbates@tamarvalley.org.uk) 01822 835035 / [sbarnes@tamarvalley.org.uk](mailto:sbarnes@tamarvalley.org.uk) 01822 835036



Volunteers identifying species at our training session at the Tamar Valley Centre  
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**TamarValley**  
 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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