High Weald AONB Unit Commissioned Report

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Field Systems Character Statement

Field systems in the High Weald

Nicola Bannister

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The High Weald: an outstanding medieval landscape

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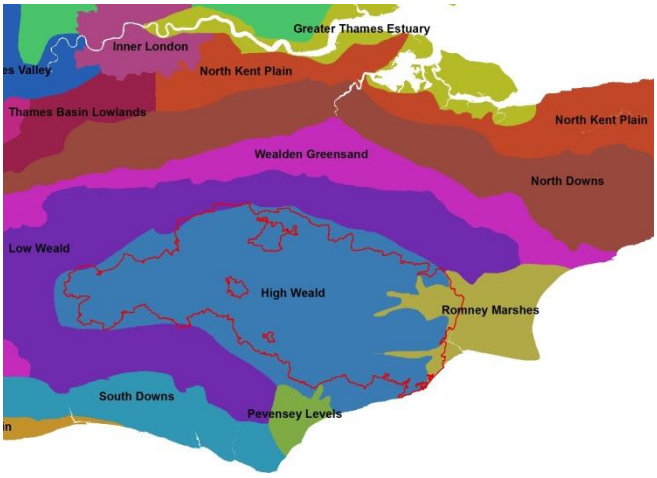
Summary

This document sets out the character of Field Systems in the High Weald AONB. A long history of woodland clearance and enclosure of land has resulted in an intimate and wooded countryside which has its origins in the medieval and early medieval period. This character survives relatively intact to the present day.



National Character Areas and the AONB boundary ----------

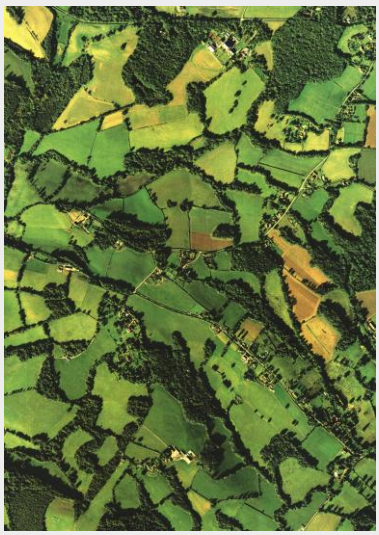
Field systems in the High Weald result from different enclosure origins and subsequent land use. Views of the High Weald reveal a landscape of small irregular fields bounded by wooded hedges intermixed with woodlands, scattered farmsteads and villages. On closer inspection, several different forms of enclosure can be found depending on topography, past land use, land ownership and farming practice. Different enclosure processes have resulted in groups of fields (field systems) which share common patterns and features. The Field Systems Character Statement describes these different types of field systems, their history and key features.

Field system *– a group or complex of fields sharing a common character which appear to form a coherent whole. In the High Weald this usually results from the influence of topography and land use, but also historic tenure.*

Adapted from: Historic Characterisation Thesaurus (Forum on Information Standards in Heritage 2015)

Contents

Field systems in the High Weald: Summary Character Statement



The High Weald is a small scale landscape hewn by hand from woodland and wood pasture. Its medieval character remains remarkably intact; not yet overwritten by large-scale modern development or industrial farming and forestry. Glimpsed views reveal a matrix of small, irregularly shaped fields surrounding dispersed historic farmsteads, interlaced with thick hedgerows, woodland and a radiating network of sunken lanes and gill streams; all draped over a ridged and faulted landform of sandstone and clay.

Field systems

- Field systems are intermixed with woods and small settlements.
- Individual fields are generally small (< 3 hectares) and irregular or semi-regular in shape.
- High proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with a smaller proportion of regular and irregular non-assarts and formal planned fields.
- Dominant fieldscape character originates from medieval farming in severalty: land held by individuals rather than in common.
- Historic farmsteads are surrounded by their own fields, and can have more than one field system associated with them.
- Sinuous mixed woody boundaries and thick hedges are common with many veteran trees and ancient woodland indicator species.
- Topography has a strong influence with many field systems are aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ancient ridge-top routeways.
- Ditch and bank boundary features are typical, topped with hedges or along the woodland edge.
- Fields are mostly used for grazing livestock or horses with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- Relic unimproved grassland is rare but floristically rich semi-improved grassland is more widespread.
- Fields preserve evidence of past land use.

1. Introduction

Field systems comprise groups of fields sharing a common character history and association with other landscape features. Individual fields are divided by visible boundaries - ditches, hedges, banks or shaws – and the 'remains of earlier boundaries now removed, present on a map or visible through geophysical survey, which form part of the distinctive common character. Field systems are associated with farmsteads, routeways, woodlands and water courses, and together these define the character of fieldscapes.

Fields are the result of the division of land for the management of arable and livestock organised from a farmstead. Some field systems evolved through gradual clearance and enclosure of land whilst others were laid out and planned. Adjustments to field patterns will have been made over time, with some boundaries removed and new ones set out as changing land use and ownership dictated. Understanding how and why fields have changed over time underpins an appreciation of their character.

Typical view of the High Weald landscape with small irregular fields, shaws and woodland

Any one field in the Weald has a story to tell. Examining the field on the ground and looking at historic maps and archives can reveal clues to its use and how it has changed over the centuries. When investigating a field or a group of fields it is important to look at the wider landscape pattern in which the field is located; its association with other historic and topographic landscape features; changes in land use over time; and local perceptions of the field/s in question.

Summary

- A field system is a group of fields which share a common character.
- Fields are divided by boundaries of different forms which include 'ghost' boundaries i.e. where boundaries have been removed.
- Fields were created as the result of tenurial arrangements and land management for stock and arable.
- Some field systems evolved gradually whilst others were laid out in a planned manner.
- Fields are associated with historic farmsteads from where the land was organised and managed.
- All fields have a story to tell about their past.

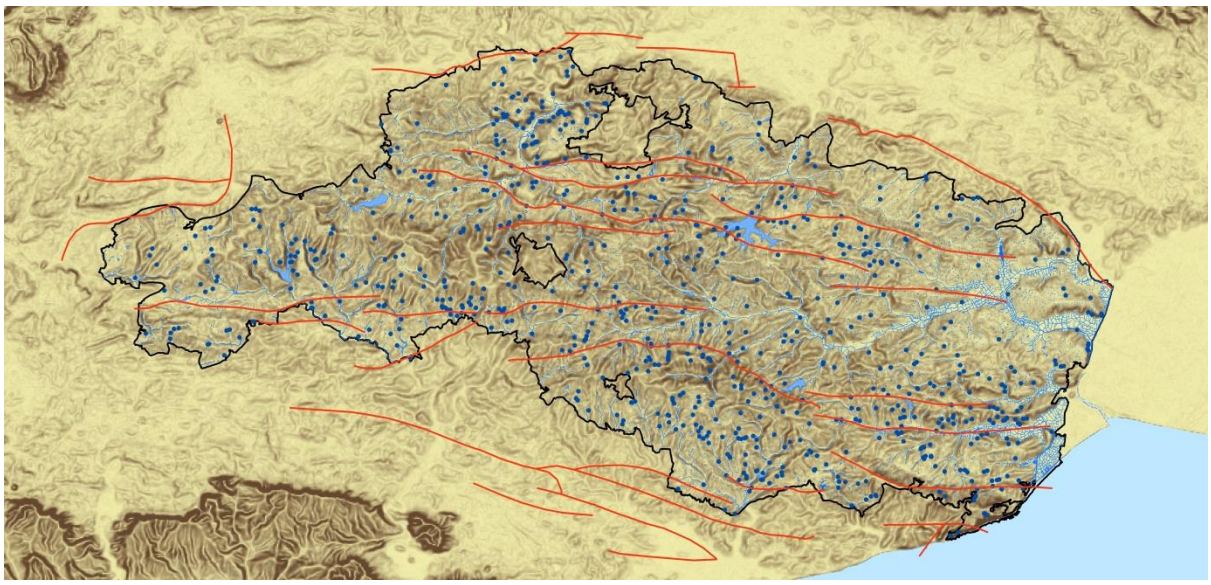
2. The story of fields in the Wealden landscape

Much of the Wealden landscape is of medieval origin but it is under-pinned by earlier land use. Further enclosure and expansion took place in the 13th century through clearance or 'assarting' of woodland and wood pasture. Key periods of enclosure (or boundary re-organisation) in the Weald are:

- Early-medieval (6th – 10th century) – early medieval farmstead territories established (virgates)
- Medieval (11th to 15th century) - last period of assarting (woodland clearance)
- Tudor and later - enclosure of medieval forests and medieval deer parks; reorganisation of earlier field systems
- 19th century – early modern reorganisation of fields for top fruit, vegetables and hops
- 20th and 21st century - modern field enlargement to accommodate larger machinery and changes in cropping systems

2.1 The Natural Inheritance

The High Weald topography comprises a series of distinctive ridges, deeply incised and intersected by numerous gill streams which give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers including the Medway, Teise and Rother to the north and east, and the Cuckmere, Ouse, Arun and Adur to the south and west. The principle ridge (the forest ridge) runs roughly east-west, stretching from Horsham to Cranbrook with its highest point at Crowborough Beacon c. 240m. South of Crowborough an attached ridge (Battle Ridge) extends from Hadlow Down, narrows and meets the sea with dramatic cliffs of sands and clays at Fairlight.

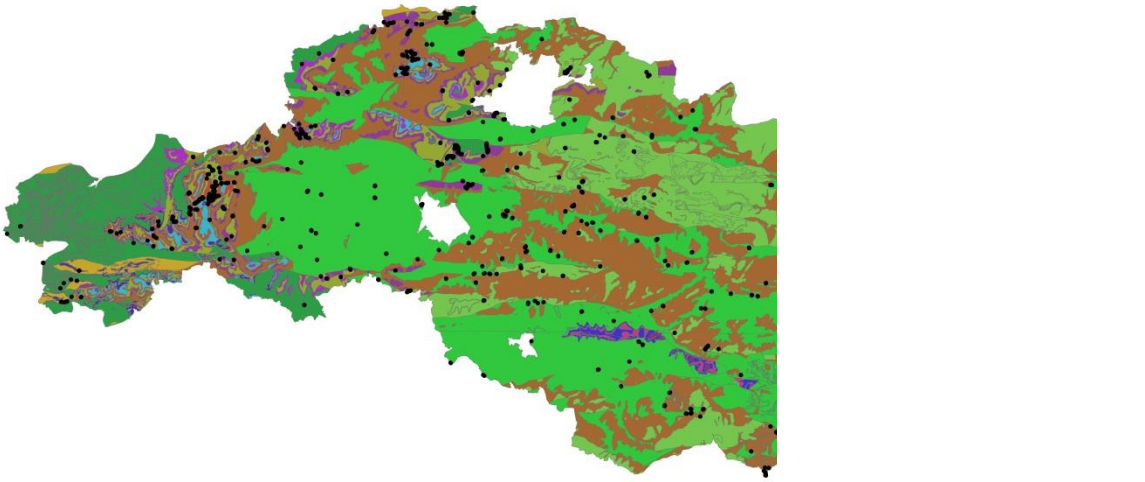


The High Weald AONB - Landform, waterways, springs and fault lines

The rocks of the High Weald are sedimentary, created from sediments deposited in horizontal beds by rivers and the sea. The earliest of these are known as the Purbeck Limestone Group and

originated in shallow lagoons. The landscape then changed to one of flood-plains and rivers which laid down iron-rich clays and sandstones, known as the Hastings Group. Around 75 million years ago a great uplift began resulting in the creation of the Wealden Anticline: a huge chalk-topped dome which was both folded and faulted under subsequent compression.

River and stream erosion removed most of the chalk leaving only a rim around the edge that is the North and South Downs. The High Weald occupies the central core of this geological landform and consists mostly of the exposed older geologies of the Hastings Group. The ridges and disjointed outcrops are formed by the differing resistance of soft clays and harder sandstones of the Hastings Group, the subsidiary folds, and the faults. The particular topography and underlying geology have created soils, and micro-climates, which are highly variable across short distances.



The geology of the High Weald AONB [1] with sandrock outcrops in black

2.2 The history of fields in the High Weald

The landscape of the Weald is ancient, created through farming, woodland management and industry over hundreds of years. In early times, prehistoric communities exploited the woodland habitats of the Weald - the valleys, glades and ridge tops - through hunting and gathering its resources. Little evidence from this period survives as tangible features in the landscape apart from occasional flint scatters from seasonal camps. The pollen record evidence for the High Weald does not provide clear indications of Mesolithic clearances within the 'wildwood' (Somerville 2003, 239). Where there is evidence for species characteristic of open ground as, for example, at Pannel Bridge in the Brede Valley in East Sussex, they cannot directly be attributed to Mesolithic activity (ibid). The lack of pollen evidence does not mean that hunters were not making significant clearings in the woodland. Evidence for Mesolithic flint scatters, for example along the ridge top road across The

[1] Based in 1:50,000 digital data by permission of the British Geological Survey

Down in Lamberhurst in Kent, and at Brightling in East Sussex, suggest hunters operating in areas which have been easier to clear and which later developed into open grassland areas from which commons developed.[2] Today the fields are post-medieval in character and origin but this does not preclude that there may be evidence for prehistoric boundary alignments still surviving.

However, with the introduction of farming, change arrived in the woods with areas cleared for growing crops and pasturing stock. Clearance by Neolithic communities is evident from the pollen record extracted from peat cores along the river valleys. These cores show increasing levels of silt from soil wash as pollen from woodland trees is replaced with pollen from grasses and other species of open and arable environments (Somerville, 2003, 241). Research in this area has been limited and, although it is likely that land was organised into fields from the Middle Bronze Age (Yates 2007), currently no datable evidence exists for Bronze Age fields surviving in the modern-day High Weald landscape. However, this does not mean that none survives.

Areas of prehistoric iron smelting became the focus for Roman exploitation of the iron resources. In these areas is highly probably that parts of the landscape were divided into fields for the growing of subsistence crops for the Roman and their native workforce. Although many of these Roman industrial sites are recorded, little evidence has been collected for the agriculture and settlement associated with them. The lack of recognition of such field systems is probably the result of a lack of research rather than an absence of evidence. The use of lidar as a tool for identifying earthworks both in woods and fields has been found to be effective across large areas such as the Weald Forest Ridge where it was used in the High Weald AONB's Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership project (2009 -2012). However, little evidence was found for complex field systems surviving in the woodlands here, rather a few isolated boundaries which could not be dated.

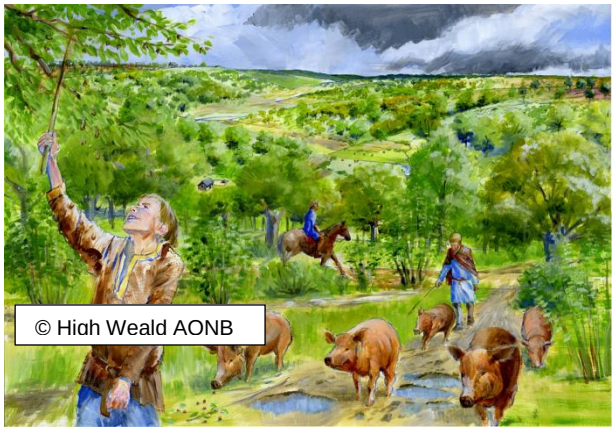
It is likely that the Wealden landscape in this period was a mixture of woodland, wood pasture, open areas, small fields and meadows. With the collapse of the Roman administration in in the 3rd century AD, woodland is likely to have regenerated over many sites but it is probable that the native population continued to farm in some areas. Into this wooded landscape, Saxon settlers arrived and began to clear the land, graze stock and exploit the rich woodland resources. Grazing livestock was probably the primary land use in the High Weald at this time.

As yet, there is little archaeological evidence from the High Weald itself for continuity of agrarian land use from the Roman period into the early medieval period. However recent research in the Low Weald has shown that in some areas Roman rural land use, and the resulting field patterns, has contributed to the historic character of fields, particularly later medieval enclosures (Rippon et.al 2015, 165-6).

Typically, field patterns in the High Weald will have originated from early medieval fields aligned along ancient routeways, settlement boundaries and local topography. In the medieval period areas already cleared by Roman settlement will have attracted later settlement and other areas would have been opened up to farming by transhumance - the fattening of stock on the rich woodland grazings.

[2] Source: Kent Historic Environment record; East Sussex Historic Environment Record

The incoming Jutish settlers carved out Kent into large agricultural or 'multiple' estates. Their estate centres were in North and East Kent droveways providing access to commons and grazing pastures extending deep into the High Weald. Similar large agricultural estates were established in Sussex. Here the main estate centres were down on the coast or along the edge of the South Downs with their territory reaching north into the Wealden woods. The estate centres became the parent manors recorded in Domesday.



The commons were divided into temporary seasonal camps centred on grazing pastures, many of which gradually became settled all year-round. These were the 'dens' in Kent and the 'fields' or 'folds' of Sussex. Through settlement and land appropriation over time more permanent farmsteads developed scattered across the wooded landscape, each surrounded by its own fields and linked by multiple tracks and paths. Some remained as farms, some were 'lost' and others become larger hamlets and villages.

The earliest settlements were situated close to springs which follow the ridges of high ground, and at key crossings on rivers and larger streams. Whilst little is known about how enclosure took place during this period it is likely that the easier better-drained soils, which may have already been cleared to pasture through repeated grazing, will have been enclosed first. Being more open, this landscape is likely to produce more regular enclosures with field systems respecting local topography, and other features.

Early farmsteads supported an extended family together with servants and bonded slaves. Farms and land were generally held in 'severalty' i.e. by freehold farmers who paid fines to the parent manors instead of undertaking manorial services on the lord's demesne. This is likely to have been the result of the sheer distance of the farmsteads from the parent manors and the difficulty of enforcing service. The exception to this were church lands, where bailiffs managed the Archbishop's estates centred on the large manor of South Malling in the Weald. Gavelkind (or partible inheritance), where younger sons managed and took the grazing lands on the Downs and in the Weald, may have contributed to the scattered nature of settlement (Everitt 1986, 179-180). The extent and influence of gavelkind in the High Weald is little understood. It may have had an influence in the 10th and 11th centuries as evidenced by farmstead place-names with the prefix 'Great' and 'Little'. The division of 'virgates' (an area of land which could support a family) as land was improved is discussed in Brandon 2003 (p87). Possibly in the later centuries the land market may have been more flexible allowing for land to be bought and sold. This was evident at Earlye Farm, near Frant in east Sussex. (See P 9 and 11 Case Study Report). Farms were generally mixed agrarian and livestock with cattle dominant, the cattle being used for draught as well as meat and milk.

This system of land holding underpinned the image of the independent yeoman farmer of the Weald. It also meant that changes in farming systems could be adopted readily by individual land

holders rather than from an absentee landowner. The evidence suggests however that Wealden farmers, knowing how difficult the soils were to cultivate, often preferred to follow tried and tested methods. These were described in 1625 by Gervase Markham and included continued enrichment of the soil from farmyard manure and from marling.

In addition to farmland there were large unenclosed areas of wood pasture and common across the Weald. The Crown claimed these as hunting grounds for Forests (an unenclosed place where the king kept deer, and was subject to Forest Law) and Chases (similar places but held by a subject of the Crown and where no special laws extended. See James 1991, 32). Those occupying the ridges of high ground along the northern edge of Sussex and extending into west Kent were particularly favoured, for example, St Leonards, Worth, Waterdown and Dallington Forests, all now enclosed to woods and fields. Ashdown Forest remains unenclosed but with small farms and fields around its perimeter. Into the medieval period smaller areas of unenclosed wood pastures and commons – remnants of the transhumance system - remained scattered through the landscape, surviving as small commons and greens.

By the end of the medieval period there was a rise in sheep numbers to support the woollen industry and farming systems began to change. Iron production was reaching its peak with the blast furnaces and forges producing guns and cannon balls as well as domestic goods. Many of the forests had been depleted of their timber by the iron masters in the 16th century making it easier to partition and enclose the land. By this point most of the former medieval forests and chases had also been enclosed, either to woodland or cleared to farmland, with more regular field patterns predominating in the latter.

In the Weald more centralised settlement developed later than elsewhere in England, a combination of the poorer soils, the scattered nature of isolated farms, the overlord control and the remnants of the transhumance system. However, by the 12th century villages were being established, often centred around a church with a market place or a green on a key routeway. Evidently their form was strongly influenced by the control held by the overlord. Some were permissive such as Mayfield whilst others had a more planned origin such as Burwash (both in East Sussex) (Gardiner 1997, 63-73). Around these new settlements enclosures were reorganised to form paddocks, small fields and sometimes larger undivided fields such as Town Field at Cranbrook in Kent.

In the post-medieval period farming underwent significant changes with gentleman farmers bringing wealth from London. Some farmsteads and their associated fields were reorganised as new farming techniques and innovations were adopted, or existing practices intensified. The 16th and 17th centuries saw an increase in population which in turn resulted in an increase in the price of corn and food. It became economical for farmers and landowners to bring into cultivation land on soils previously not deemed suitable - areas of woodland, 'forests', commons and wetlands. Processes such as enclosure to improve the organisation of land, marling or liming and denshireing to improve soil fertility became common (Brandon 2003, 114-117 & 122-128). Marling and the extraction of iron stone were complimentary activities as the latter often lay beneath layers of marl.

This was a time when husbandmen produced books such as Fitzherbert's *Boke of Husbandry* 1534 and Gervase Markham's *The Enrichment of the Weald of Kent* in 1638. Convertible husbandry, a Wealden strength, where the waste products from the farmyard could be utilised on fields in the

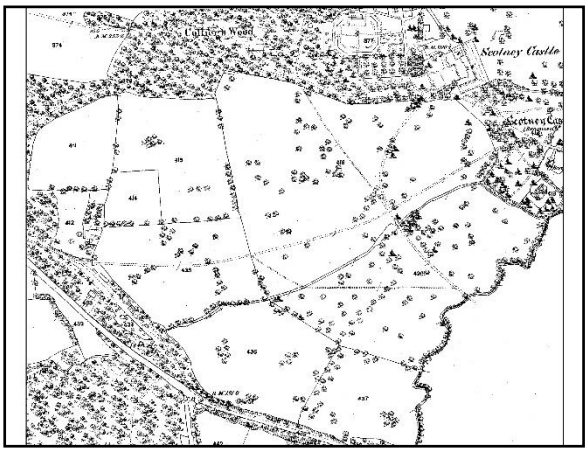
following year, was advocated. Ley pasture and arable were inter-changeable in long rotations to enable soils to regain fertility. Fields were organised to facilitate this system with cattle, over-wintered in byres and yards, fed on hay, browse and roots, with straw and bracken, which was returned to the fields as manure. The arable and ley pasture fields were located on the high ridges, to facilitate better drainage. Markham also advocated the grubbing up of heavy wooded boundaries and their replacement with hedges and fences. Wooded boundaries were considered to be detrimental to corn growing with loss of land not only from the width of the boundary but also from the shade cast by the trees.

In the 19th century there were further significant changes in Wealden agricultural methods. The innovators were generally landowners from beyond its borders who had significant amounts of capital (not unlike the 21st century today). The use of horse drawn seed-drills to replace manual broadcasting is one example. The assiduous use of manures and all forms of soil enrichers and improvers on the heavy clay soils - marling - continued into the early part of the 19th century.

A further change was the cultivation of hops for brewing. By the beginning of 16th century beer was being drunk instead of the native ale and by the 17th and early 18th century the planting of hops became established. Hops need fertile, well-drained soil so they were often grown in the small valley fields along streams or in silted up and abandoned hammer ponds. As the growing of hops became more popular more extensive hop gardens were planted near to the farmyard giving them ready access to the required quantities of manure. Smaller fields tended to be used as cobnut platts. Much of the ridge and furrow seen today in High Weald fields may date from the period of the hop gardens where soil was mounded to assist drainage.

***Scotney Castle Estate**: the parkland overlying the former fields*

Whilst the 16th century saw the enclosure of medieval deer parks, other significant changes occurred later with the creation of new small parks and gentrified landscapes. Field boundaries were often removed, leaving only the mature trees set within grassland. For example, in the 19th Edward Hussey III removed the field boundaries around the medieval castle at Scotney in Kent in order to create a landscape in the Picturesque style. The old hedgerow oaks survive to show the ghost outlines of the former medieval field boundaries. The medieval deer park of Scotney, now cut by the A21 Lamberhurst by-pass, lay to the north of the present park and was enclosed after the Civil War.



***Scotney Estate**: Extract from OS Epoch 1 c. 1860 showing field boundaries*

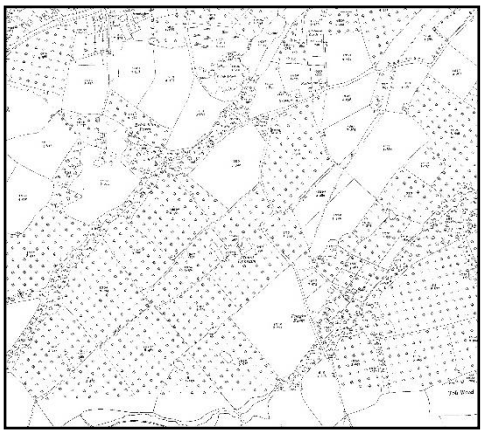
***Scotney Estate**: Aerial photograph today showing the relict boundaries as lines of former hedgerow, now parkland, trees (Source: Google earth)*

The intimate relationship of historic farmsteads with different field systems is an area of research which needs to be explored further. Over half of the historic farmsteads in the Kent High Weald have remained unchanged or only moderately altered since 1895 suggesting that their relationship with the adjacent fields has also remained little altered (Lake, Edwards & Bannister 2014, 109). The unsuitability of many farm buildings for adaption to other farming processes is a strong factor combined by the character of the independent (from manorial control) yeoman farmer, resisting change with these difficult to work soils. Overlordship and tenurial control was more relaxed in the High Weald thus change imposed from above was not so common compared with areas where the lord of the manor or land owner had more directly control over any tenants.

Many of the medieval historic farmsteads are associated with the 'assart' fields – those cleared from woodland or medieval common 'waste'. Where change has occurred in the farmstead character this is often reflected by a close association with fields that have also undergone change. So where new cropping and stocking regimes were adopted, both fields and buildings were altered to accommodate the change. Close to the farmstead, 'forstals' (open ground in front of the farm) where enclosed to paddocks. Some fields were enlarged to form hop gardens with oast houses built away from the main farmstead due to the fire risk. (See the Kent Historic Farmsteads Data – Kent Historic Environment Record).

Large orchards were established in the 19th and early 20th century causing the further loss of internal field boundaries. Orchards tend to have been laid out in older more regular or cohesive assart type fields; the hedges and shaws removed and replaced with shelterbelts, often alder or poplar and occasionally Leyland cypress. Once the orchards became unprofitable many were grubbed out and converted into arable with only external boundaries remaining as evidence of the former medieval field pattern. Other top fruit, soft fruit and horticultural crops continued to be extensively planted in the 19th century.

***Cranbrook**: Large fields south of the village created from former orchards (Source: Google earth)*



***Cranbrook**: Orchard planting south of the village (Extract from OS Epoch 4 c.1930)*

For a detailed account of the history of farming in the Weald see Brandon (2003).

Summary

- Much of the present field systems in the High Weald are probably early medieval in origin.
- To date firm evidence for prehistoric field systems surviving extant in the High Weald landscape has not been found but this does not mean that they do not exist.
- There are areas of 12th century enclosure from woods and wood pasture which produced a distinctive field pattern (assarts).
- Into the medieval field pattern subsequent land use produced modifications by boundary replacement, removal and realignment.
- Post-medieval enclosures of the medieval forests, chases and deer parks also produced a distinctive field pattern.
- 62 % of historic farmsteads in the High Weald have remained unchanged or only moderately altered since 1895 (Lake et al 2014), indicating that their working buildings continued to serve the farm operation and suggesting that the fields themselves may have remained relatively unaltered.
- Historic farmsteads appear to be associated with assart fields, whilst farmsteads that have undergone considerable change appear to be associated with modern field amalgamation (Kent Farmsteads Data and Revised Kent HLC for HW AONB).

3. Field patterns in the High Weald landscape

Views across the Weald reveal a landscape dominated by trees and woodlands, interspersed with fields enclosed by wooded hedges. At the landscape scale fields appear small and irregular in shape but, whilst this describes the dominant character, there is greater variation than first appears.

Topography together with the variability soils is a strong influence on field patterns across the High Weald. The High Weald landscape comprises a series of ridges divided by stream and river valleys. Along these ridges and areas of higher ground open downs and heathy areas survived into the medieval period. The valley sides were where the more fertile, and freely draining soils occurred. Here the earliest historic farmsteads tend to occur along spring lines. In the valley bottoms the ground is often seasonally water-logged and was less attractive to permanent settlement.

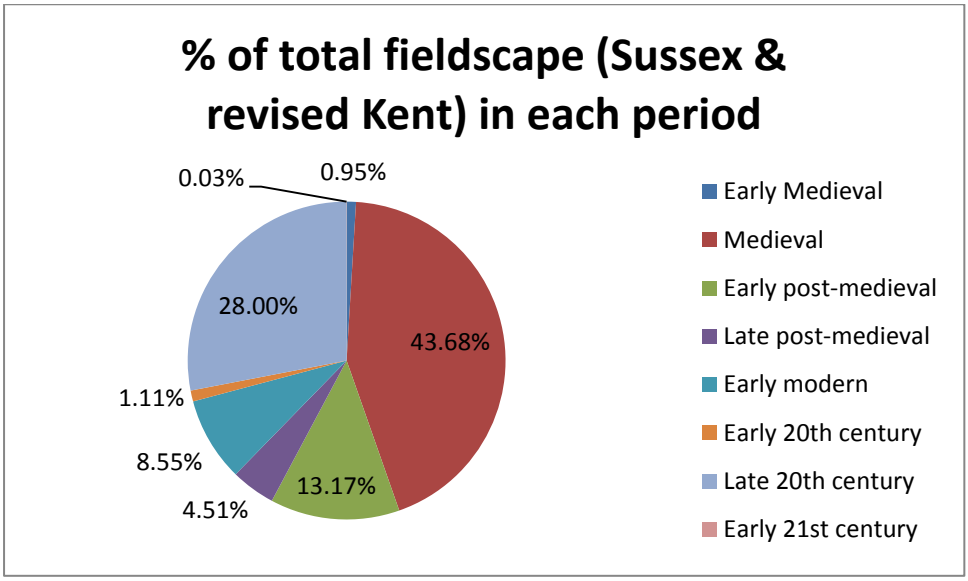
Field patterns around individual farms reflect the mixed nature of Wealden farming with small – medium sized, more regularly shaped fields used for arable and pasture set close to the farm or on the higher ground. A more **regular form** tends to imply greater levels of planning. Fields close to the farm may have experienced increased levels of intervention and boundary alteration as greater amounts of land use change are accommodated. Further away from the farm, fields used for hay meadows and grazing tended to be smaller with a more irregular form. These may have undergone less, or no, modifications especially where they were close to woodland or within narrow river valleys. An **irregular form** may be the result of more piecemeal enclosure or the alteration of earlier planned fields.

Regular fields with an apparent planned layout are more likely to have been enclosed from open ground free of trees and scrub. In open areas, such as the ridge tops straight field boundaries could more easily be set out. Regular fields but with sinuous boundaries were probably enclosed from more open wood pasture and tend to occur along the valleys sides. Irregular fields are the result of gradual clearance of woodland creating very sinuous field boundaries. They are typical of the period of 12-13th century assarting. Irregular fields also occur in the valley bottoms.

Nearly 60% of field systems in the High Weald have their origin in the medieval period and remain substantially unaltered.[3] Overall Wealden fields, at less than 5 ac, were small by national standards (Brandon 2003). This was in part due to the difficult nature of the soils (generally heavy clays or soft sandy loams) which needed both drainage and continued improvement (manure and marling) to continue to produce crops and good grass. The nature of enclosure – from woodland or wood pasture - also contributed to the small size. It is a much slower process to create fields from woodland than from more open ground. In addition, the work was generally undertaken by single families establishing a farmstead, rather than a group of people working directly under manorial control. The clearance of trees relied on grazing stock nibbling back new growth and creating glades, which could then be enclosed (Brandon 2003, 81-90). As enclosure was undertaken by hand the fields needed to remain small. The thick woody boundaries owe their longevity in part to the value

[3] The statistics are derived from the High Weald AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation Data

placed on timber and underwood. Today average field sizes remain low. An analysis of mastermap data in 2016 for four Kent parishes show an average field size of 2.24 ha or 5.5 acres.



Field systems that have been substantially reorganised in the late 20th century (1945-) account for less than 30% of the fieldscapes with the proportion of very large fields adapted to large machinery and industrial farming remaining low.

Field patterns are influenced by many variables - the local topography, the land use from which they were enclosed; the process of enclosure; the relationship of the fields to the historic farmstead; ownership changes over time; and subsequent land use. Understanding the origins of field patterns requires research both on the ground and in the archives.

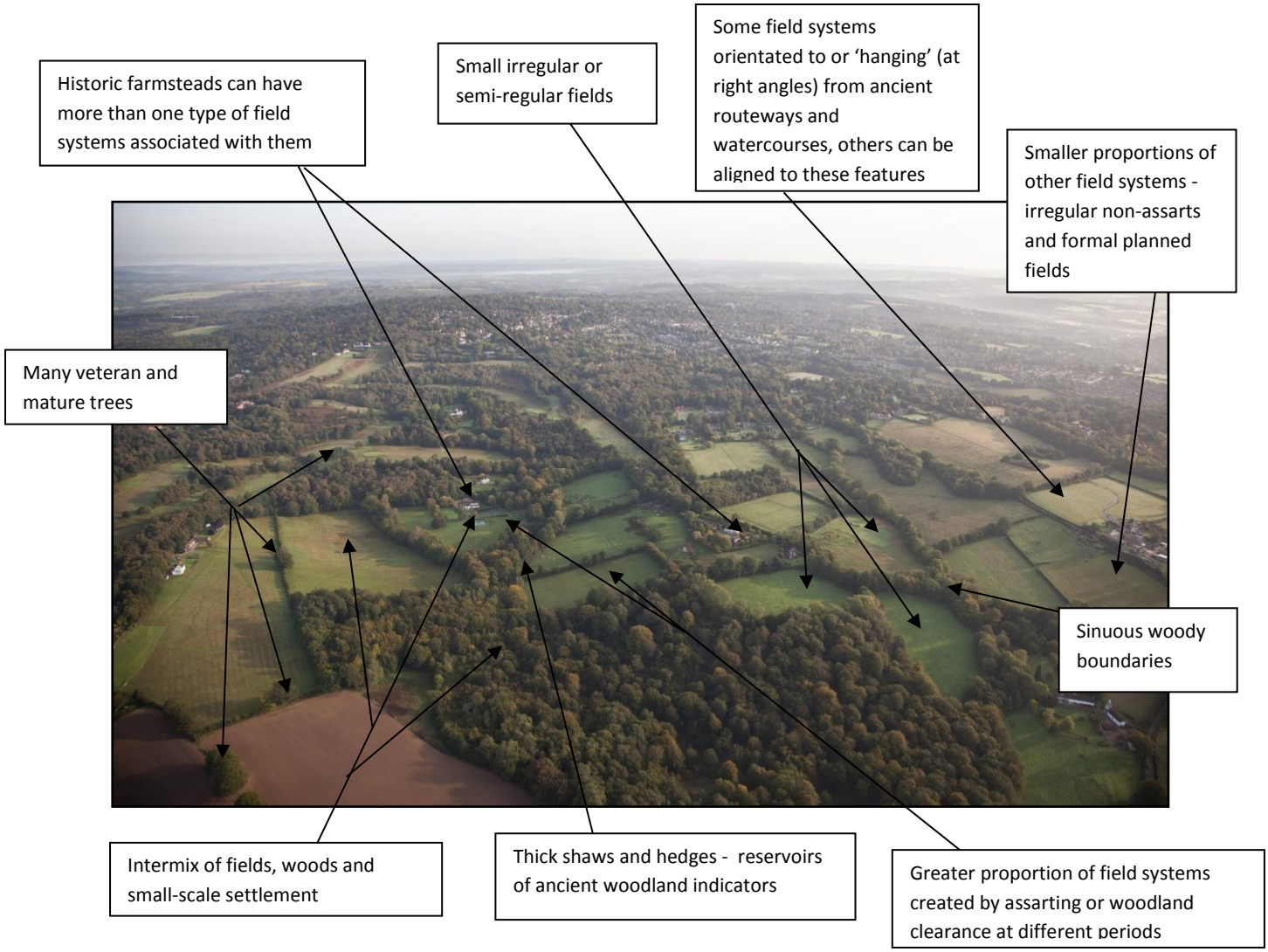
3.1. The characteristic features of field systems in the High Weald

Different aspects of field system character are revealed as consideration moves from a landscape scale to individual fields. Evaluating the character of any given field or field system involves understanding their historical context and their characteristics at three different scales:

- **Landscape scale** - their extent, size, shape, pattern and texture; and their relationship with other features such as villages and historic farmsteads, historic routeways, woodlands and excavation pits.
- **Farmstead scale** – how field systems character expresses the interaction between past land use, farming practices and the physical environment, including their relationship with individual farm buildings and features;
- **Individual field scale** - characteristic features of ecological and historic value that may survive within the field or its boundaries.

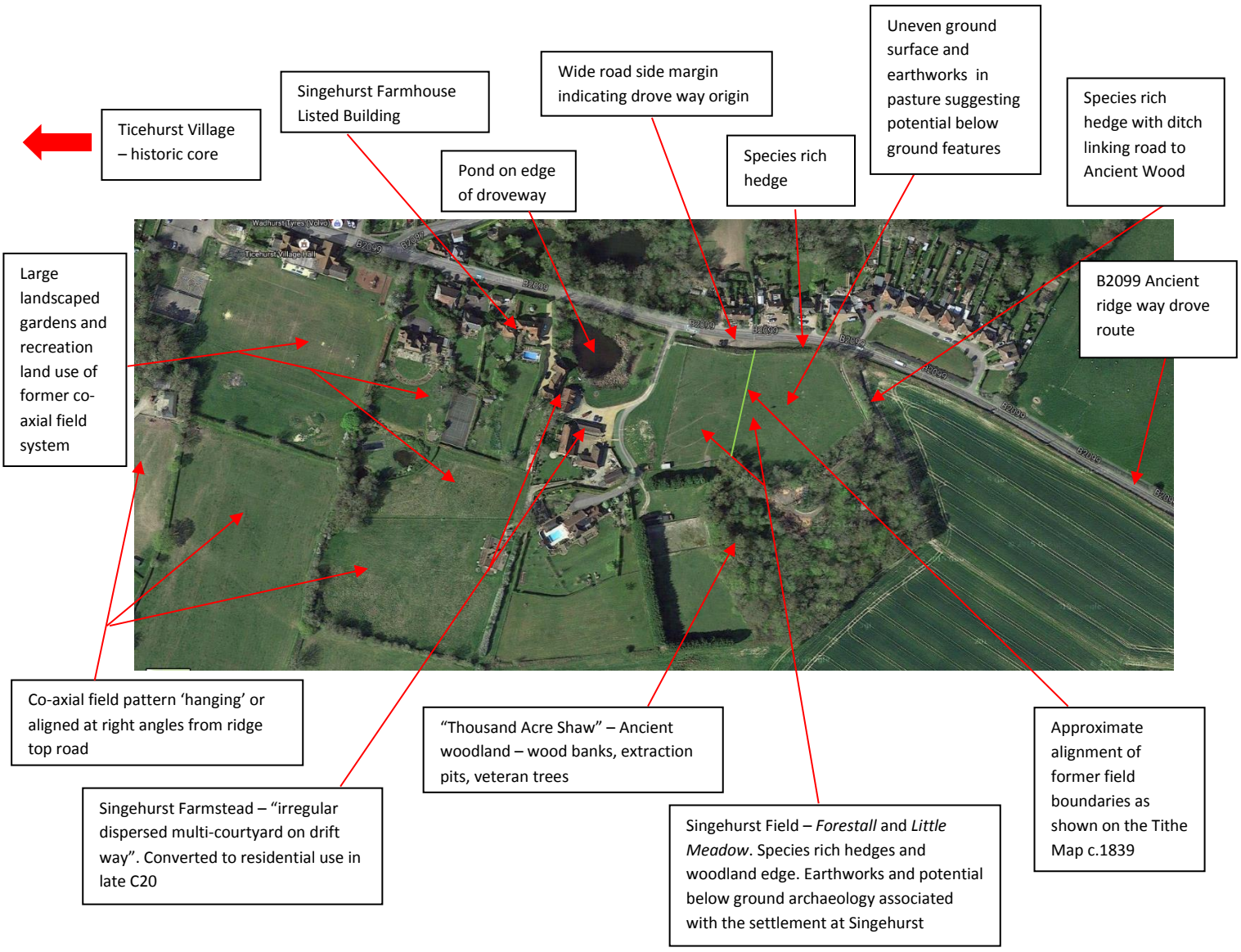
Landscape scale – field systems and fieldscapes

- Field sizes are generally small (<3 hectares)
- Shape – irregular shaped assarts with the irregular fields intermixed with regular shaped fields depending on origin and subsequent land use.
- Alignment – often with historic routeways and topographic features such as streams and ridge tops.
- Boundary morphology – generally sinuous boundaries but with some straight ones' inter-mixed depending on origin and land use.
- Origin – Predominantly medieval and potentially early medieval where place-names pre-date 1086 [Domesday].
- Intermixed with small scale historic settlement and ancient woodland.



Farmstead scale - groups of fields creating field system/s

- Field systems reflect land use, for example, more regular arable pastures close to the farmstead or along the higher less steeply sloping ground; smaller fields for orchards and paddocks; irregular-shaped meadows in valleys and permanent pastures further away from the farmstead. They also reflect tenurial control.
- Mixed species hedges but often a species dominance reflecting past boundary use, for example, hazel and holly which was used as a winter fodder.
- Veteran trees are common and often there is a floral- rich boundary margin.
- Intact assart fields of both types appear to be associated with historic farmsteads that have undergone only a small amount of change.



Individual field scale

- Heritage components associated with the field which include ancient routeways; excavated pits and ponds; archaeology within, adjacent to and below the field.
- Ecological components related to the history of fields include veteran trees, ancient pollards and coppice stools derived from a history of hedgelaying ; unimproved meadows and established anthills; species rich verges, ditches and banks; wide woody hedges and shaws.

4. Gazetteer of main field system types in the High Weald

Described in the following Gazetteer are different types of field systems identified by their similar features and attributes. The descriptions are drawn from the revised Kent HLC for the High Weald AONB (2010 ongoing) and from the Sussex HLC (2007) together with the results of the High Weald Field Systems Project. Where such field patterns occur in the landscape and where they are relatively intact with little boundary change then they are of special significance. Completeness of pattern together with rarity of type should be considered with their contribution to landscape character and local distinctiveness, the land use and historical ecology of any given area.

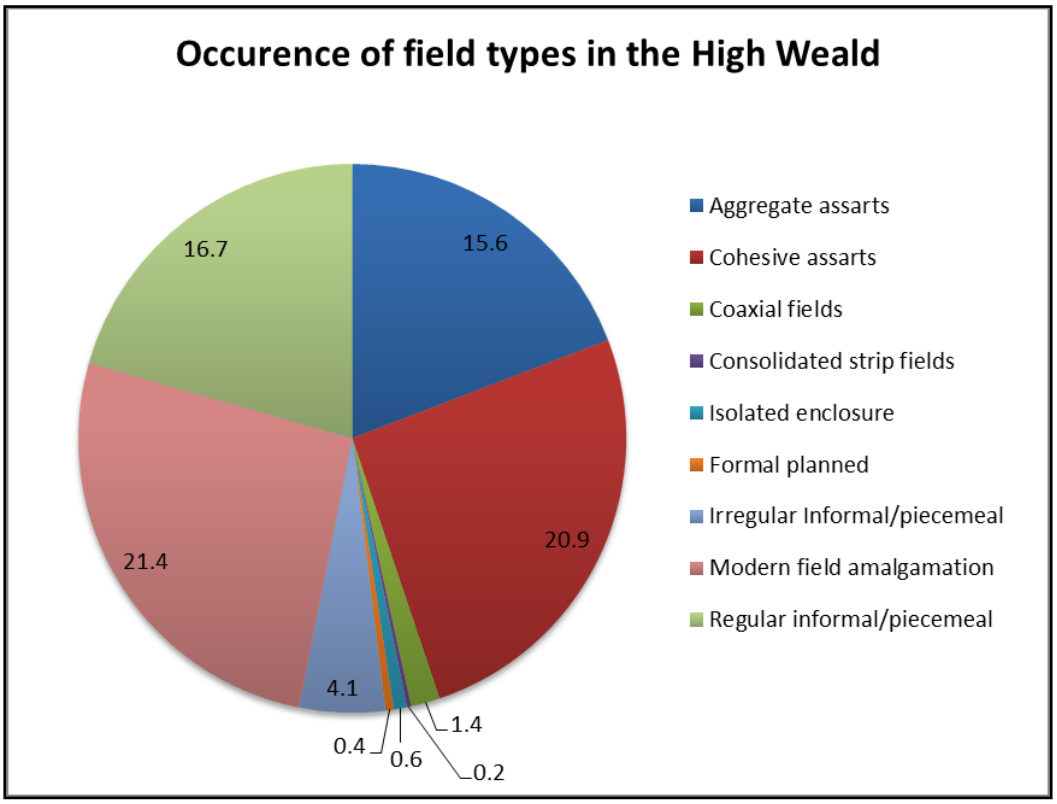
Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
HLC identifies the historic character surviving in the present-day landscape. Groups of fields with distinctive patterns that share common features have been characterised. Attributes including pattern, boundary morphology and the processes of enclosure have been used to define types of field systems. Each type is assigned a descriptive name. HLC's are produced on a county basis but a national gazetteer of HLC terminology gives an overview of descriptions and types.

Limitations of the data: Field system types identified by the HLC for the High Weald are based on informed expert judgement using the sources given. Further in-depth research for any site may reveal new evidence that may influence the decision- making process.

The following descriptions are of the main field system types identified in the High Weald. The identification is based on several key attributes of fields - size, shape, relationship to each other and other landscape features, and pattern identified from key data sources, in particular historic

mapping. For any given historic farmstead holding, there may be several field systems types associated with it depending on historic land use, topography etc.

The typology is ordered alphabetically, **not** in order of antiquity. This reflects Historic England's Historic Landscape Characterisation Thesaurus which is also ordered alphabetically and not by date or origin. Whilst the majority of field systems in the High Weald have a medieval origin it is very difficult to date the fine-grain of field system patterns and it is that intimate mix of field patterns which contributes to historic character and local distinctiveness. Far more research is needed into the dating and origins of fields and their boundaries in order to build up an improved evidence base.



Occurrence of field types in the High Weald, calculation based on Kent and Sussex HLC. The numbers show the proportion of a certain field type of the total area of field systems in the High Weald (Sussex and Kent HLC area).

Table 1. Summary of Key Attributes for HLC Field Systems

HLC Field System Types	**BOUNDARY**							**FIELD**				
	Sinuous	*Straight*	*Curved*	*Mixed*	*Woody*	*Hedge*	*Ditch (with water ?)*	*Regular rectangle*	*Regular square*	*Irregular*	*No pattern*	*Ancient wood associated*
Aggregate Assart	Yes				Yes					Yes		Yes
Cohesive Assart	Yes				Yes				Yes			Yes
Consolidated strips	Yes		Yes			Yes		Yes				
Co-axial or 'ladder'	Long axis	Short internal			Yes			Yes	Yes			
Formal planned		Yes				Yes			Yes			
Informal regular	Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes			
Informal irregular		Yes			Yes		Yes			Yes		Yes
Modern amalgamation				Yes		Yes	Yes				Yes	

The table above is a summary of the key characteristic attributes for field system types in the High Weald. Any one of the types can also retain characteristics of other types to a greater or lesser degree, for example woody hedges may occur in areas of formal planned fields where field boundaries have been left unmanaged; or a cohesive field pattern may have a greater number of hedges, where the shaws have been managed, removed and replaced with hedges. Field systems are dynamic and subject to change overtime.

4.1. Assarts - Aggregate

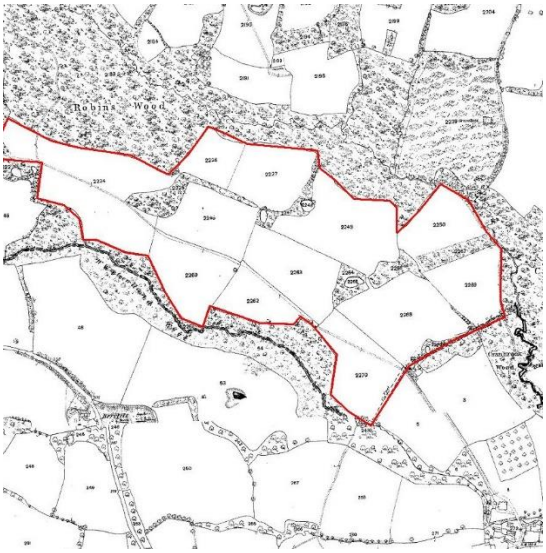
[Sussex and Kent HLC term = Aggregate Assarts]
[National HLC = Ancient Enclosures - irregular ancient enclosure, Anciently enclosed land, Assart]

Characteristic Features

- Clearly defined groups of irregular shaped fields
- Sinuous boundaries, woody hedges and shaws of mixed species with ancient woodland indicator plants.
- Shrub component on a bank with ditches usually silted, some banks may have an asymmetrical profile indicating their former use as a wood bank

- Veteran trees, pollards and stubs – boundary markers
- Frequently close to ancient woodland, often gill woodland
- Close to, or associated with, later medieval farmsteads
- Remains of old stiles, gateways, hollow ways and footpaths
- Ridge and furrow, quarries, marl pits, iron stone pits
- Usually pasture – sometimes soft fruit
- Average size of fields 2.2ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden)

***Example**: Robins Wood, Cranbrook - Aggregate assarts carved from adjacent woodland, between two areas of gill woodland*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 circa 1860

Source: Google earth

Aggregate assarts are fields which have been enclosed from woodland, wood pasture, commons or 'waste' areas by informal, unplanned processes. The name 'assart 'comes from the French word meaning 'to clear and enclose land'. In the Weald the process created small irregular fields bounded by sinuous hedges (filled with ancient woodland species) and shaws (narrow strips of the woodland). Thus the description 'aggregate' means that the fields were grouped together not in a systematic manner but 'aggregated' together as the woods were cleared. Many ancient woodlands show evidence in their outline where fields were carved from them. These fields may be associated with farmsteads whose names date from the 11th century and later, and may be personal manorial names. Some assart fields can be part of older farmsteads where there has been expansion of fields into adjacent woodland.

The fields, generally small, are laid out in an irregular pattern with mostly wide sinuous woody boundaries. They are often intermixed with small enclosed woodlands, or lie on the edge of larger areas of woodland which also have sinuous irregular boundaries. It is thought that these fields represent some of the last woodland clearance which took place in the 12th and 14th centuries (Harris 2004). The field pattern is created by gradually clearing and enclosing ground in an ad-hoc fashion, building up a system of fields around a farmstead. Laying out regular fields within dense

woodland is more difficult than just gradually clearing in a piece-meal fashion. The size of fields reflects what could be cultivated by a small family, given the very difficult nature of the soils.

The ecological diversity of the boundaries in terms of habitat structure and species reflects its close association with the former woodland habitat. Aggregate assarts are strongly associated with gill woodlands. In the medieval manor of South Malling, the creation of new fields and farms was still taking place in the 13th century with holdings referred to as 'Old Assarts' and 'New Assarts' (Du Boulay 1966, 136-137).

Examples of aggregate assart fields occur frequently in the parishes on the county boundary between Kent and Sussex, where much of the landscape still remained as woodland well after 1086, for example, in the parish of Hawkhurst at Sisley and Pix Hall on the edge of Bedgebury, Park Wood and Frith Wood (now Bedgebury Forest) and to the east of Hawkhurst village. Another example is near an ancient gill woodland called Robins Wood in Cranbrook.

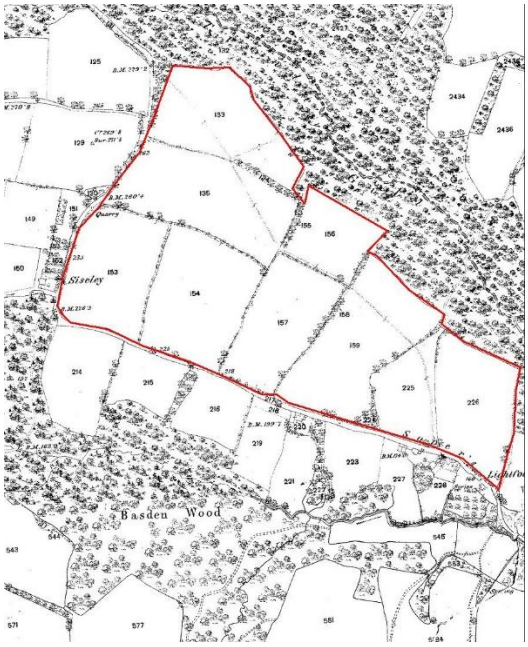
4.2. Assarts - Cohesive

[Sussex and Kent HLC termed = Cohesive assarts]
[National HLC = Ancient Enclosures - irregular ancient enclosure, Anciently enclosed land, Assart]

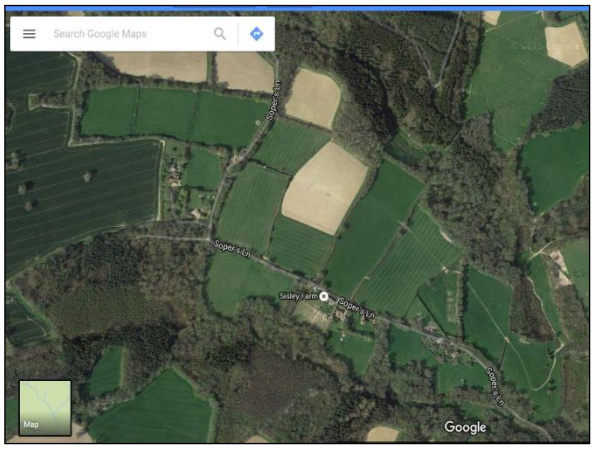
Characteristic Features

- Clearly defined groups of semi-regular and regular fields, with a strong regular pattern aligned with the grain of topography and ancient routeways
- Often comprising internal woody hedges and external woody shaws
- Shrub component on a bank with ditch (often silted)
- Veteran trees - pollards and stubs
- Close to historic farmsteads or aligned along trackways and routeways
- Associated with farmsteads with early settlements names relating to the transhumance process, den, ley, hurst, fold.
- Close to ancient woodland including gill woodland
- Remains of old gateways, stiles, hollow ways, stone and iron pits, ridge and furrow and plough headlands
- May have outfield barns located in them
- Often now under arable, more rarely permanent pasture.
- Average size of fields 2.5 ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden)

Example: *Siseley was a den belonging to the Manor of Wye lying in Hawkhurst. The second part of its name 'ley' meanings clearing. The fields by the historic farmstead are aligned along the lane – Sopers Lane, and between two woods. The boundary of the territory of the medieval den was perambulated in 1507 [Lightfoot 1863, 79-84].*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 c. 1860



Source: Google earth

These are groups of small or medium, often regular or partly semi-regular, fields bounded by species rich sinuous hedges and shaws. They are likely to be the result of earlier medieval enclosure from woodland and open wood pasture, and are closely associated with farmsteads with names originating before 1086. The fields will often show a strong relationship or orientation to topography and older routeways.

Cohesive assart fields, which have all the characteristics of the aggregate assarts, except that they have a more regular layout are found across the High Weald. Both have a strong association with settlements ending in den, fold and hurst. For example, the area of Hazelden in the north west of Cranbrook parish, lying to the east of Old Park Wood. It is possible that cohesive assarts represent a period of enclosure pre-dating aggregate assarts. They may relate to the enclosure of land which had a more open nature, such as wood-pasture, or around settlement where a more formal structure could be laid out. The parish of Hawkhurst preserves large areas of cohesive and aggregate assarts This is likely to be due to the Hawkhurst being the last part of the early medieval common of the Royal manor of Wye to be colonised.

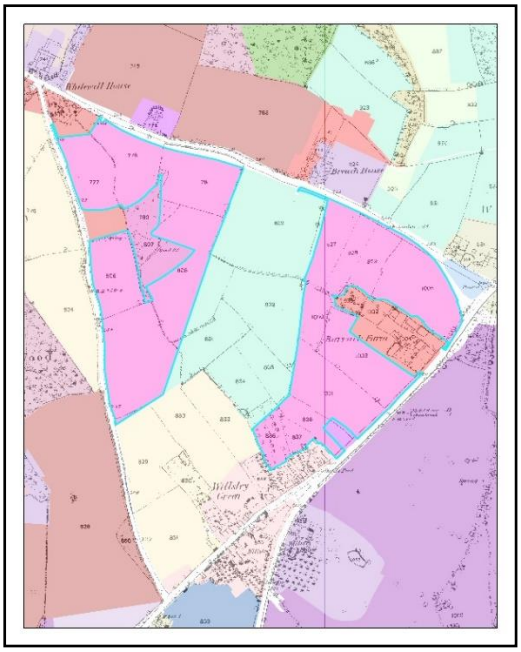
4.3 Consolidated Strip Fields and Strip Fields

[Sussex and Kent HLC = Strip Fields and Consolidated Strip Fields]
[National HLC = Piecemeal enclosure –furlong, strip fields, reorganised field system]

<u>Characteristic Features</u>

- Regular groups of rectangular fields long, narrow and broadly rectangular, often interlocking with dog-legs.
- Hedges both managed and unmanaged.
- Traces of ridge and furrow, plough headlands, old track ways etc.
- Associated with historic farmsteads often those with personal manorial names
- Average size of fields 1.7ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden).

Example: *Wilsley Green showing possible remains of consolidated strip fields occurring on light and sandy soils*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 overlain with Kent Revised HLC showing consolidated strip fields (outlined in blue)

Source Google earth

Farming in strips, or furlongs, is usually associated with land held in common and farmed from a centralised village. In the Weald land tended to be held in severalty with individual farmers working independently from scattered farmsteads surrounded by their fields. As a result, the identification of small pockets of this group of field patterns in the Weald, and especially the High Weald, raises some debate. Elsewhere in the Southeast they are found along the coastal margins of Kent and Sussex, and in north Surrey along the Thames Valley. They were found extensively on the Hoo Peninsula where Edward Hasted made reference in 1797 to a surviving open field system in Cooling. Historic map evidence later provided confirmation of the enclosure type characteristics.

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This system appears from the HLC, to survive in areas where there has been apparent continuity of settlement from prehistory into the early post-medieval on loamy soils suitable for arable cultivation. The fields generally have curving longitudinal boundaries and are rectangular in shape, fossilising the 'strips'. The boundaries may also have dog-legs in them where they follow the edges of groups of strips. There is much to understand and research about these boundaries. Are the strips managed as part of manorial tenancy custom or does gavelkind exert a stronger influence than expected in the High Weald? Are the consolidated strips associated with hamlets or shrunken hamlets in the Weald as they are elsewhere in the country?

Generally, the hold of manors over land in the Weald, by customary rights which divided arable land between its tenants, was weaker than elsewhere. However, in some cases manorial customs remained strong into the post-medieval period (Brandon 2003, 81-90), for example on land held, or formerly held, by the church.

Consolidated strip fields are fields enclosed from grouping up strips into several fields. It may be that they represent a farmstead where the custom of gavelkind was strong. Gavelkind is system of

inheritance where land is divided equally among all the co-heirs. The resulting strips or divisions of land could be scattered through several fields. Evidence for this field system type has been observed in the parish of Cranbrook at Turnden Farm to the south west of the Town and at Barrack Farm to the north, close to Wilesley Green. It could also be that the soils in these areas were far easier to work (being of a more sandy-like nature) and as valuable land had been in cultivation for a considerable length of time.

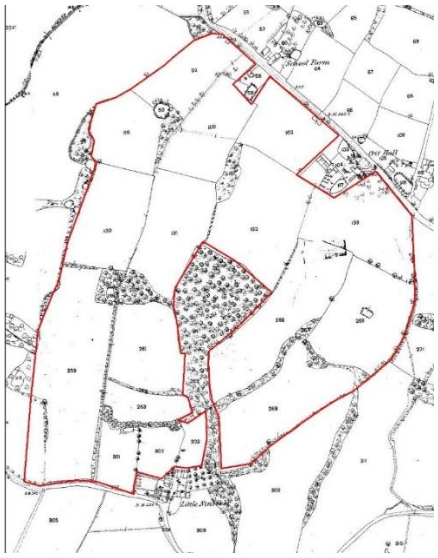
4.4. Coaxial fields

[Sussex and Kent HLC = Coaxial fields]
[National HLC = Ancient Enclosure – coaxial field system – dual axis, irregular, regular]

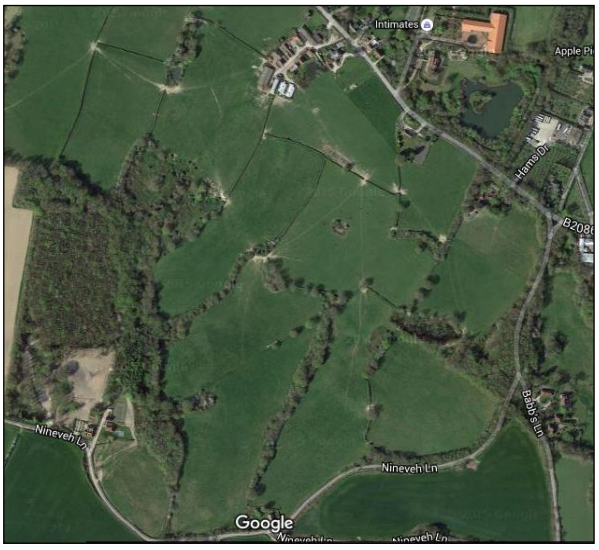
Characteristic Features

- Regular small fields with strong directional alignment often with the topography. Tend to have a long sinuous axis with short internal divisions
- Woody hedges and hedges on banks with silted ditches
- Can be associated with ancient woodland such as old coppices
- Associated with historic farmsteads with early place-names but may have smaller farms also associated with them.
- Often have undergone some significant boundary loss, but will still retain the strong alignment.
- Often associated with other heritage features such as old stiles, gateways ridge and furrow, plough headlands. Older tracks and routes tend to follow the long axis.
- Mix of pasture and arable, and some secondary woodland.
- Average size of fields 2.1ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden).

Example: *Remains of coaxial fields at Little Ninevah in Benenden with the long axis of the fields orientated north-south and shorter east-west hedges and shaws creating sub-divisions; the pattern probably influenced by the topography of an east-west ridge to the north bisected by north-south gill streams.*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 circa 1860



Source Google earth

Field systems comprising small regular fields all orientated in the same direction with long axial boundaries and sub-divided with shorter boundaries. Field systems may be contained, aligned, framed or 'hang from' (be at right angles to) roads, hill-top ridges or streams. The fields may appear to be laid out like ladders, with long sinuous boundaries all following a definite direction and with short, often straight internal divisions.

Where coaxial fields occur elsewhere in the East of England such as Essex and Suffolk, they are thought to be prehistoric – Bronze Age in origin (Rackham 1986; Rippon et al 2015). Coaxial fields running for over a mile occur in the Low Weald in West Sussex. Such field systems have been attributed to Saxon estates extending from the South Downs, northwards into the Weald, possibly fossilising earlier transhumance routes (Chatwin & Gardiner 2005). Shorter lengths of coaxial fields have been researched in East Sussex where they represent the territory of older virgate settlements (Gardiner 1985, 109-14).

Coaxial fields have been identified at Pococks Gate Farm, Frant in the High Weald, which may also be an older virgate laid out on the edge of Waterdown Forest. (See the Earlye Farm Case Study, P11). Several pockets of possible coaxial fields have been identified in Cranbrook on the edge of the High Weald, for example, around the farm of Branden near Sissinghurst (which lies outside of the High Weald on the junction with the Low Weald). These appear to be only fragments of a larger area. Topography may also be a strong influence in the laying out of the fields at Branden as the ground slopes down to the Crane Brook.

Where such a field system occurs and remains intact with little boundary alteration it is of high significance for being a possible continuum from an early Roman or prehistoric field layout. More research into the origin of these field systems is needed. It could be that there are two forms of co-axial fields; those created through the influence of topography and those which are the result of territorial division in the early medieval period.

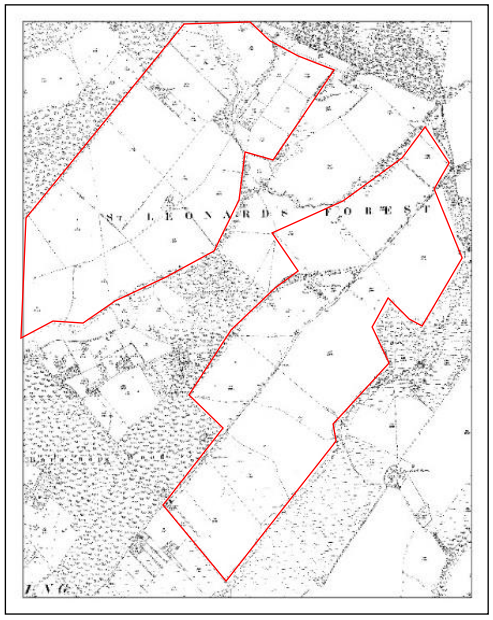
4.5. Formal planned Fields

[Sussex and Kent HLC = Formal planned fields]
[National HLC = Planned enclosure, parliamentary enclosure]

Characteristic Features

- Regular rectangular or square fields laid out in a planned fashion.
- Medium - large in size
- Main boundaries are hedges on small banks with small ditches
- Hedges are often species poor dominated by hawthorn, blackthorn etc. with evidence of hedge laying
- Associated with plantation and secondary woodland within the planned pattern
- Modern gates, stiles, few tracks and foot paths
- Mostly arable, some permanent pasture
- Farmsteads post-medieval or 19th century planned layouts, with field outbarns

***Example**: St Leonard's Forest in the western High Weald is characterised by formal planned fields enclosed without an enclosure act.*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 circa 1860

Source: Google earth

Enclosure of land through parliamentary enclosure is rare in the Weald and confined to the enclosure of small commons such as the edge of Ashdown Forest or the Broyle in the Low Weald in East Sussex (Kay 2000). Formal planned fields are those which have a regular pattern, with straight hedges and show evidence of having been formally laid out (often aligned to roads, or associated with new road layouts). Small pockets of formal planned fields, where small commons have been enclosed in the late post-medieval and early modern periods, survive in Cranbrook, for example at Cranbrook Common and Wilsley Green. The shape of the common is often fossilised within the edges of the group of formal fields. The hedges are dominated by only several species and may have regularly spaced hedgerow trees.

Commons and greens are a feature of the Weald, remnants from the Saxon period of transhumance (or droving) where animals could be kept overnight and where water was available in the form of ponds or streams. They were also areas which the manorial tenants still retained ancient rights of common for grazing, turbary, and the cutting of furze. Greens were places where fairs could be held, stock bought and sold, and small numbers of livestock grazed.

4.6. Informal Irregular Fields

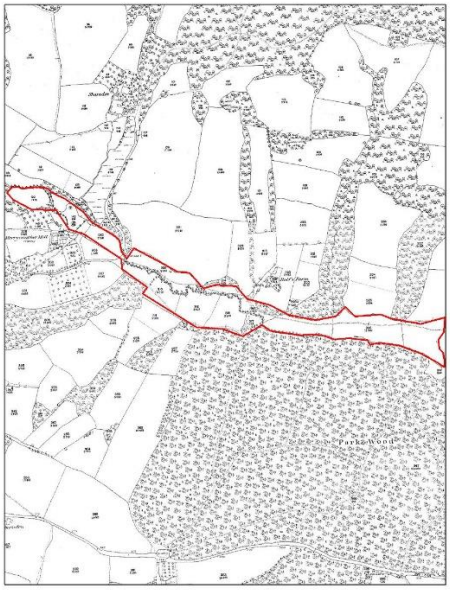
[Sussex and Kent HLC = Irregular Informal Fields]
[National HLC = Ancient enclosure – irregular ancient enclosure]

<u>Characteristic Features</u>

- Irregular or semi-regular small fields
- Sinuous boundaries following the course of streams
- Often occupying the bottom of stream valleys with hedges or lines of willows or ditches
- Associated with Alder woods and wet coppice
- Wetland features such as bridges, weirs, leats and water-channel management

- Usually under permanent pasture
- Sites of hammer ponds, ridge and furrow, ditches for water management
- Average field size 1.7ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden).

Example: *Small fields alongside a west to east flowing stream near Mayflied. Hammer ponds also occupied this valley in the 16th and 17th centuries.*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 circa 1860

Source: Google earth

The Weald is bisected by numerous small streams and tributaries of the main rivers draining out towards the coast. Within their small valleys irregular or semi-regular fields occur, laid out in an informal pattern but strongly contained within the valley bottoms. Bounded by ditches often with hedges, these fields may have been created for the cultivation of hay and early pasture for stock. The keeping of cattle was in important part of Wealden farming as they provided valuable manure for keeping up the fertility and improving the structure of the difficult Wealden soils. In order to keep stock through the winter, they had to be removed from the pastures in early autumn, to avoid poaching, and overwintered in barns. Here they were fed on hay and cut fodder from hedges and woods and/or root crops. The accumulated silts in the valleys provided fertile soils for early grass and hay. Some of these fields were created from the silted up and abandoned hammer ponds created by embanking the Wealden streams as a source of power for forges and furnaces. The fields were subsequently drained and many used from growing hops in the 18th and 19th centuries.

4.7. Informal Regular Fields

[Sussex and Kent HLC – Regular Informal Fields]
[National HLC = no comparison]

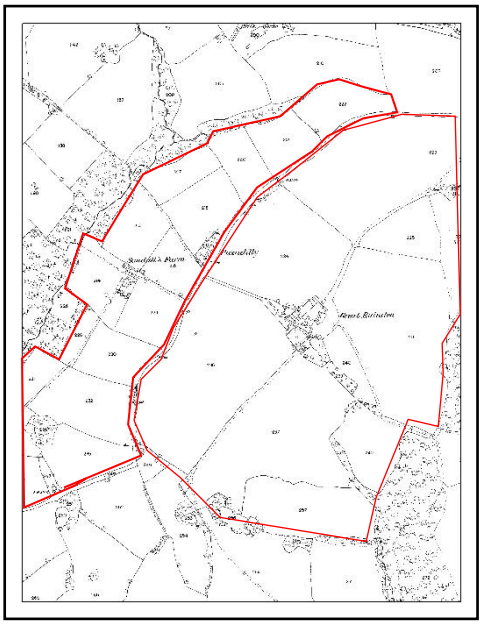
<u>Characteristic Features</u>

- Regular-shaped fields, with a mix of sinuous and straight boundaries.
- May form a discrete system associated with former deer parks or chases etc. which is in turn surrounded by a curving boundary.

- Mostly managed hedges but some may be more woody
- Some boundary re-organisation often associated with farmsteads which have undergone re-organisation themselves
- Veteran Boundary marker trees more rare
- Modern gates and stiles
- Ridge and furrow, plough headlands, old ghost boundaries and trackways where significant modern ploughing has been absent.
- Associated with both older farmsteads, small hamlets and around villages
- Average field size 2.0ha (based on the revised HLC for Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Benenden).

These are fields which have a regular pattern but with slightly sinuous hedged boundaries or a mix of sinuous and straight hedges. Such fields are generally bounded by hedges rather than shaws. They can be of varying size. Often such field systems are associated with historic farmsteads and especially those which have increased in size or undergone modifications to the farm plan during the post-medieval period. These are fields which probably represent either enclosure from an open environment possibly previously cultivated or the reorganisation of an earlier field system. They differ from planned enclosure in that the field system does have some variations in its pattern. To understand the origins of regular informal fields more research is needed into farming changes and their impact on fields.

E**xample:** *Great Bainden in Benenden, with regular informal fields at different sizes (larger at Great Bainden, smaller to the west.*



Extract from OS Epoch 1 circa 1860

Source: Google earth

As farmers have sought to improve efficiency fields have been enlarged through amalgamation or they may have been completely re-organised. These fields occur across the High Weald and appear to be more concentrated on higher ground and close to villages for example at Hawkhurst, Benenden and Cranbrook, dating possibly from the late medieval or early post-medieval period. This field pattern appears to also be associated with the enclosure of medieval deer parks, for example at

Glassenbury in Goudhurst. Such field systems may preserve boundaries from an older field system, for example at Benenden where the regular fields close to the church have some boundaries comprising particularly large banks suggesting earlier territorial boundaries.

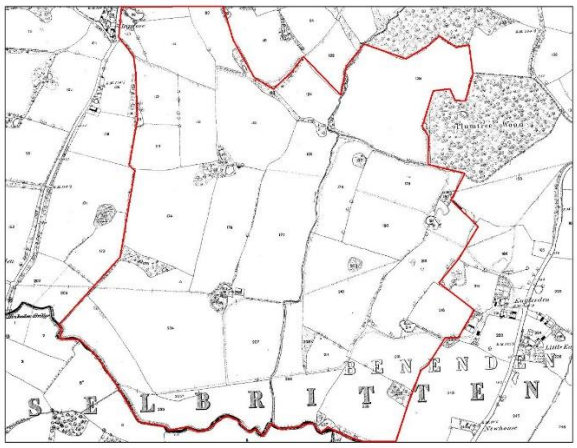
4.8 Modern field amalgamation

[Sussex and Kent HLC = Modern field amalgamation, prairie fields]
[National HLC = Modern enclosed land, reorganised field system]

Characteristic Features

- Medium to large fields, no apparent pattern but with the remains of former field systems surviving especially in the orientation of the external boundaries
- Over 50% of internal boundaries removed with remaining boundaries comprising hedges, wooded hedges and shaws on banks with silted ditches
- Modern gateways
- Veteran trees of former boundaries isolated in fields -fewer veteran trees in hedges
- Soil marks of former boundaries showing on aerial photos, or as crop marks
- Ploughed out boundaries, pits and platforms, evidence of below ground archaeology visible as crop and soil marks
- Fields may include grubbed woodland

***Example**: Eaglesden in Benenden with aerial showing the loss of internal field boundaries compared with the field pattern in c1910 - 1930 (OS Epoch 3 or 4)*



Extract from OS Epoch 3 or 4

Source Google earth

These are fields created by the removal of a significant proportion of internal boundaries. It is a process which is thought to have only occurred in the 20th century but the historic mapping suggests that it was happening in the 19th century as early as the 1840s. (This was quite common elsewhere in the country). In the High Weald modern fields are strongly associated with modern fruit growing, which started in the late 19th century, possibly linked with the coming of the railways. The process has continued well into the 20th century. The fields are generally large by Wealden standards with 50% or more of the internal boundaries removed. The remaining boundaries are likely to be of considerable antiquity.

5. The heritage value of field systems

To prepare a statement of significance for the heritage value of field systems the following elements should be taken into account:

- Identification of the different types of historic landscape components
- The density of such features and their association with the field/ field system
- The structure of the earthwork component and its association with other earthworks in the field/s
- The archaeological potential beneath the field, and beneath the banks
- The completeness of a suite of features reflecting land use change
- The typicality and rarity of heritage landscape components such as Roman bloomeries, medieval deserted farmsteads, prehistoric and roman settlement sites, former boundaries.
- Antiquity of field systems and their associated boundaries [This is the age based on evidence The lack of accurate dating for any field/boundary should not detract from its heritage value based on other components]

See the High Weald Field Systems Method Statement (P7) for when and for whom to assess the heritage value of fields and field systems.

Where possible the heritage value of any field system or group of fields should be supported by archive evidence sourced from primary (manuscripts and historic maps) and secondary sources (published and unpublished reports, papers etc. Though for field systems instances these may not be available).

5.1. Historical evidence

Historic evidence for field systems is not systematic and the survival of manuscripts is often partial. The study of archives requires specialist skills and knowledge especially when dealing with older and legal material. However, some historic material will be available for most sites.

Use of maps and archives

There are two main sources of information for informing historic field systems character and their historic asset value.

Historic Maps

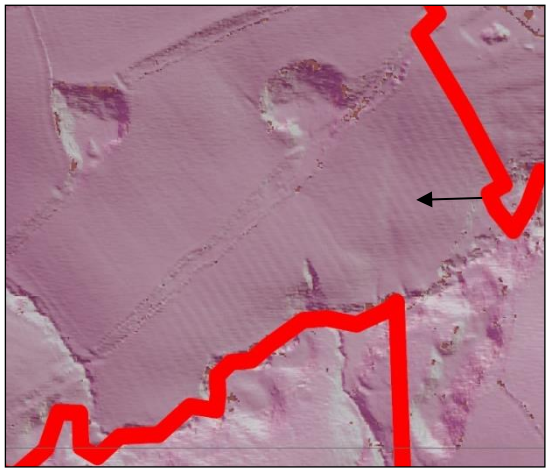
- Ordnance Survey Maps. These include the historic editions of the Ordnance Survey dating from circa 1860 (1st edition 6") to the 1930s and 1940s for the Revised Editions. **The OS 25" 1st edition probably gives the best picture of complete field systems before modern field amalgamation becomes more dominant**, although in some circumstances boundary reorganisation was taking place prior to 1860. However, for a more complete coverage and survival the OS 2nd Edition c. 1890 can be used. Still with the Ordnance Survey are the Draft Drawings undertaken by the OS Surveyors circa 1870-1810 for the 1" 1st edition. These maps are the initial drawings and vary in detail but many do show accurate field boundaries. The ones for the South East can be very detailed, depending on the surveyor and draughtsman.

- Tithe Maps Tithe Maps were produced between 1839 and 1845 as part of the Tithe Surveys for the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. These maps were either surveyed for the Tithe on a parish by parish basis or based on earlier surveys of parishes undertaken by private landowners. These maps are relatively accurate, but only produced for those parishes where tithes were due. Land held directly by the church was not liable for Tithe and thus no map was produced.
- Estate maps were prepared by surveyors and map makers for private landowners. They vary in detail and extent but can provide plenty of detail such as positions of gates, hedgerow trees, land use etc. again depending on the surveyor. Portrayal of boundaries can vary between maps. Baker 1962, describes the approach to boundary typology as depicted on historic estate maps in Kent from pre-1750.

Surveys – rentals – estate and manorial records

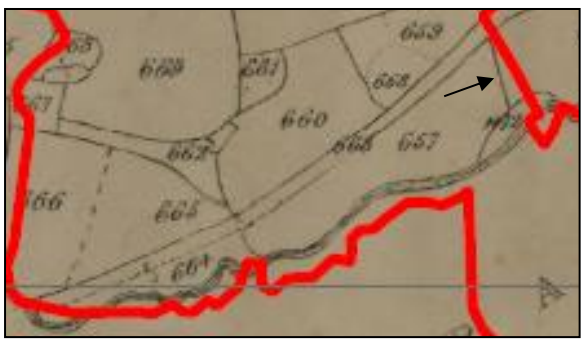
There is a wealth of archive sources which can provide supportive evidence for field systems. It is advised that once this stage is reached an expert in reading and interpreting such materials is consulted. Archive offices can help identify suitable people. Consulting key archive sources can help inform what can be found in the field and to understand how certain field systems change over time.

Example: archive information for Early Farm, Frant, East Sussex



Extract from the LiDAR showing ridge and furrow with shallow ditch/hollow way

Extract from Estate Map Lightlands 1813 [ESRO AB 16S] showing ditch as field boundary with hops to west. The hop field was possibly called Heave or Neave Gate Field and the one to the east was called Stable Field



Extract from the Tithe Map for Frant.
Field 657 is unnamed and adjacent 656. A new straight hedge replaces the older sinuous boundary. Field 665 is called The Shambletts.

Alignment of old boundary ditch which is cut by ridge and furrow

The example above shows how use of historic maps together with field work and modern survey sources can tell a story about the history of one field. The LiDAR shows ridge and furrow overlying a ditch or hollow way. This was confirmed in the field where the ridge and furrow extended across the field and was bounded by plough headlands. The field boundary to east comprised mostly hawthorn on a bank with silted ditch. Individual hawthorns showed evidence of having been laid. The Tithe Map for Frant of 1840 shows this boundary. However, a map of 1813 for the Lightlands Estate shows a boundary following the alignment of the ditch with hop grounds to the west.
Thus between 1813 and 1840 the boundary was removed and the hop grounds extended eastwards to a new boundary planted up with thorn. The field is not given a name suggesting the division was towards the Tithe survey date. This evidence suggests that the ridge and furrow was created by the hop gardens. The 1813 map shows the hops in a straight line indicating the hops were grown on a string and frame system. In between the hop plants the ground was probably tilled using a *horse drawn nidget* to keep the weeds at bay (Filmer 1982, 23). This cultivation process appears to create a shallow ridge and furrow effect. Today the field is under permanent pasture which is relatively species rich.

5.2. Heritage Assets

Associated with field systems are other landscape features, also providing evidence of how the fields have developed and been used in the past. Old routeways, small areas of woodland, lines of trees and veteran trees together with farmsteads and outlying barns all contribute to the character of the field systems in the High Weald. Within the fields themselves are archaeological features also providing evidence of the agricultural practices undertaken in the fields.

Boundaries

In the past much of the research on fields has concentrated on the hedgerows and field boundaries. They are the defining character of the historic rural landscape. See Appendix 2 for a detailed account on the history of boundaries in the High Weald.

The boundaries define field types on the ground. Boundary character varies significantly depending on structure, the living component and how they have been managed.

Boundaries in the High Weald comprise banks and ditches – the banks to plant the hedge on and the ditch to manage drainage and water flow. Banks would increase in size through ditch clearing and soil accumulation. On sloping ground the earthwork often takes the form of a lynchet or step-type bank. (Lynchets are created by the downslope movement of soil caused by cultivation from the top of a field to the bottom).

Field Banks are usually between 1.5 and 2.0m in width and 0.5 to 0.75m in height. They have a symmetrical

profile (unless forming a lynchet). Banks with other origins such as pales or territorial boundaries may be up to 4.0m wide and 1.0m high – the banks appearing overlarge for the hedge. Boundaries of former woods will have banks with an asymmetrical profile.

It is generally accepted that ancient enclosures and assarts have boundaries with a high floristic species diversity, reflecting their antiquity and origin with the species dominating ancient boundaries often reflecting past land use. Manorial tenants had the right to cut underwood and browse from their hedges, which would have meant the cultivation of those favourable species. Cutting of underwood fodder or browse in winter was a common practice for feeding livestock. Hedgerows and shaws would have been managed to provide a good supply of browse such as holly and hazel during the autumn and winter time.

Boundaries often served other functions other than for sub-dividing fields to create spaces in which organised cultivation and stock keeping could take place (See Appendix 3).

Routeways

Field systems are closely associated with routeways – some still in use as roads, or footpaths etc. whilst others are abandoned tracks or hollow ways. Where the route is older than the field pattern, the latter will often respect it, and the fields are aligned with it. Lesser routes such as footpaths will cross fields, providing direct links between farms and villages. Stiles, gateways, veteran marker trees are all features found within boundaries in any field system and are an integral part of their character. The Roman Road which crosses the parish of Benenden in Kent was a strong landscape feature and the later medieval fields respected it and were aligned to it. (Revised Kent HLC for Benenden 2014).

Field Names

The interpretation and origin of field names is a difficult subject as names can become corrupted over the centuries. Field names can, however, be useful in understanding how fields have changed and how they have been used in the past. Where historic archives survive, some field names reveal continuity back into the medieval period. Some show how fields relate to other landscape features. The iron industry contributed to the naming of fields at a time when the High Weald landscape was beginning to be mapped. Forge, Furnace, Pond and Colliers Fields all generally date from 16th century. Some fields may be suffixed by ‘meadow’ indicating permanent pasture. An absence of field names for example in Tithe surveys can indicate late field division or re-organisation or planned post-medieval enclosure.

Archaeology

Within any field system earthworks may survive indicating past land use. Features such as plough headlands along the edge of boundaries; raised ground where the oxen or horses turned when ploughing the field. Headlands may still survive in fields where the boundaries have been removed. Ridge and furrow is also found in fields across the High Weald. Its date and origin is not clear. Some

may be medieval whilst other examples, especially the narrower ridges, may be the remains of hop gardens or cultivation. Ploughed out routeways and ditches will leave linear features across a field. The sites of old barns or abandoned farmsteads may survive as rectangular levelled platforms.

It is important to understand the context and archaeological sequence of features within a field. Using maps and field work together it is possible to piece together the landuse history of the field and its boundaries.

Archaeological features may lie buried beneath the ground surface, such as prehistoric sites, Roman settlement and iron workings and deserted farmsteads. These features may be directly related to the field system in which they lie.

The identification of such features is difficult in the High Weald for several reasons:

- The extensive coverage of soils by woodland and pasture making visual identification by crop and soil marks (aerial photographs) difficult. In addition, the lack of arable fields available for field walking, together with the dispersed nature of such sites also contribute to a difficulty in identification (Gardiner 1990, 33-53).
- The paucity of development-led archaeology (through new settlement and communications) until the last few years.
- The fact that settlement has evolved in the same place rather than migrated around the landscape, thus the archaeological resource is preserved buried beneath existing historic farmsteads.
- The paucity of archaeological research in this area, (Gardiner 1998, 95-110).

The development of techniques in geophysical survey has meant that new sites within fields are now being identified without damage to the site, especially where there is a close association with extant heritage features or earthworks. The use of lidar and traditional aerial photographs are very useful for identifying the features such as ridge and furrow as well as the post-war loss of extant earthworks through ploughing and cultivation. The use of lidar is illustrated in the Earlye Farm Case Study (P9 and11).

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APPENDIX 1. Glossary and Definitions of Heritage Features

*** Source: Historic Characterisation Thesaurus** (Forum on Heritage Standards 2015) with some minor adaptions for the High Weald
**** Source: Monument Type Thesaurus** (Historic England) with some minor adaptions for the High Weald.

Assart* - Land enclosed from woodland. Required licence in the medieval period but term applied more generally in landscape history. Can include planned and regular enclosures and piecemeal irregular ones. Often still with numerous trees on boundaries.

Boundary** – the limit to an area as defined on a map or by a marker of some form.

Boundaries in the High Weald tend to comprise a combination of earthen banks and ditches with or without a hedge or trees. Usually boundary banks are accompanied by a ditch, the source of the earth for the bank. Where the ditches are not regularly maintained they can become silted and shallower.

Rounded banks - Field boundaries generally have a rounded symmetrical bank (except where Asymmetrical, large or a Lynchet.

(Large rounded bank, Earlye Farm)

Asymmetrical banks - Asymmetrical banks are typical of woodland boundaries.

(Asymmetrical wood bank between fields, Earlye Farm, suggesting fields are assarts created from woodland clearance leaving the wood bank in situ)

Large banks - Banks which are larger than the above usually over 3.0m wide and can by up to 0.5m high indicate that once formed part of a boundary serving a different function such as park pale, territorial boundary or Saxon or prehistoric enclosure boundary

(Glebe Field, Benenden)

Boundary Markers - A marker of some form used to indicate the limit of an area or a piece of land. These can be either of stone or living trees, or stiles with boundary marks on them.

(Veteran ash tree, Earlye Farm)

Silted ditches - Wide shallow depressions aligned alongside the bank. Important source of silted material

(Rounded bank and ditch, Earlye Farm)

Unsilted ditches – where the drainage system has been maintained and the ditches cleaned out – spoil usually spread underneath the hedge

(Re-dug and eroded ditch, Earlye Farm)

Co-axial Fields* - Field system with prevailing orientation. Most boundaries straight or nearly so and closely align with main axis or run perpendicular to it. Usually prehistoric or early medieval. Suggestive of early planned land allotment.

Consolidated strip fields – Enclosures of strips into groups, creating new fields – see Strip fields

Denshiring – the paring of turf and pasture, burning it and spreading the ash back on to the soil, undertaken as part of the farming system ofconvertible husbandry.

Enclosure* – a broad term for all agriculturally improved or cultivated land
[from 'enclose' (verb) To surround land with a boundary, to bound on all sides, especially of common land]

The National Characterisation Thesaurus distinguishes between 'ancient', 'recent' and 'modern' enclosure; and between farmland that has been deliberately organised (or re-organised) into various forms of field system and farmland whose form is derived from enclosure of land used for different purposes such as land reclaimed from the sea.

Extraction pits - a common feature of the High Weald. The varied geology provided valuable minerals for exploitation, such as marl, clay, and iron stone.

Iron ore pits - Varying sizes of pits and small quarries often seen in a line on a map following the geological strata. A source of iron stone for the smelting into iron. Found close or on boundaries with or without water.

(Ore pit, Earlye Farm)

Marl Pits- Small pits or ponds at the corner of fields or edge of woodland, where marl, a form of calcareous clay, was dug out from and spread on the adjacent fields to 'sweeten' the soil. Many are now filled with water and serve as field ponds

Ferling – a fourth part of quarter

Fields** – an area of land often enclosed, used for cultivation or the grazing of livestock.

Fieldscapes – groups of field systems which contribute to historic landscape character and local distinctiveness

Field boundary – the limit line of a field

Field pattern - the pattern that a group of fields makes

Field system* –a group or complex of fields sharing a common character which appear to form a coherent whole. In the High Weald this is usually results from the influence of topography and land use, but also historic tenure.

Gateways – an opening that can be closed by a gate

Historic gateways - Small, wide enough for a cart. A gate is a moveable structure which enables or prevents entrance. Usually supported by gate-posts.

Enlarged modern gateways - Wide enough for tractor and large farm machinery. Edges of banks eroded, worn. New gates and posts. Often historic gateways are widened perhaps on one side only.

Hide – original amount of land which could be ploughed in one year using one plough and support a family plus retainers. Vary with soil quality 60-180 acres usually comprised 4 virgates but could be more depending on the local interpretation

Hollow ways - Sunken routeways with a surface well below the level of the adjacent fields. Often bounded by hedges on banks but can also be found running through fields as sunken ditches where boundaries have been removed.

(Hollow way, Stream Farm, Benenden)

(Hollow way associated with a quarry, Earlye Farm)

Irregular* – A term used in relation to fields whose boundaries are often curving or sinuous and whose shapes do not conform to a regular pattern.

Lynchets -** A bank formed at the end of a field by soil which, loosened by the plough, gradually moves down slope through a combination of gravity and erosion.

Step-shaped earthworks found beneath boundaries aligned across the slope. Also found as earthworks in fields where the boundary is no longer in use. Vary in size from very low less than .25m to high over 1.5m Indicating former field patterns. Important source of dating material.

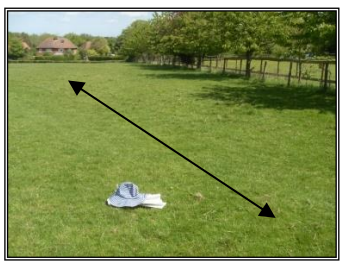
Marling - marl a calcareous clay dug from pits and then spread on clay soils with the intention of improving soil structure.

Meadow** - A piece of permanent grassland, often near a river, which is usually managed to provide a crop of hay.

Open fields* – A system of fields in which several farmers held land in common, intermixed in narrow strips assessable via length and width, with low or no separating boundaries. Mostly medieval. Few survive. Lost to piecemeal enclosures or planned enclosure.

Platforms - Levelled areas on sloping ground or raised areas on flat ground. The site of former buildings or barns.

Plough headlands - The area at the edge of a field where the plough is turned. A narrow strip of land where a plough and team could turn. This usually remains higher than the ploughed land.
Modern - Modern tractor ploughing leaves a sharp-edged plough edge to the field with a small gully.
Historic - A rounded raised mound running parallel with the boundary.



(Low wide bank adjacent to modern boundary, Benenden)

Ponds - Often former extraction pits but can be dug as sources of drinking water for livestock. Located at corners of fields (if in the middle of a field then they could indicate where boundaries have been lost).

Regular* – a term used in relation to fields in which boundaries tend towards the straight (rather than the sinuous) and so form patterns dominated by quite rectangular fields.

Ridge and Furrow** - A series of long, raised ridges separated by ditches used to prepare the ground for arable cultivation.

The result of ploughing to create raised ridges with intervening furrows, either for drainage or as a result of the direction and method of ploughing. This was a technique characteristic of the medieval period but in the High Weald later systems are common.

Narrow Ridge and furrow - Long parallel ridges less than 5 metres across separated by furrows, usually formed by the use of a heavy plough capable of turning the soil. Some ridge and furrow can be narrow (1 – 2 m) and is usually ascribed to the post-medieval period. Often this is the result of ploughing to aid drainage for orchards and soft fruit or hop gardens. In hop gardens the ridges could be created using mechanical weeding machines, called nidgets, drawn by horses up and down between the lines of hop plants.

(Narrow ridge and furrow, Attwater Farm, Cranbrook)

Broad ridge and furrow - Long parallel soil ridges in excess of 5 metres across separated furrows. Not all ridge and furrow found in the High Weald is narrow, some can be wider and is ascribed to the medieval or early post-medieval period.

Shaw – a narrow strip of woodland dividing fields, sometimes called a rew or shave.

Strip fields* – Long narrow plots of land within an open field.

Sulung – Kent term for a hide.

Stone Quarries - Generally stone quarries are small and are characterised by exposures of natural rock, to differentiate them from large iron ore pits. In some instances, it may be possible to identify where the stone was used, for examples, as foundations for farm buildings.

(Stone quarry, Attwater Farm, Cranbrook)

Stiles - Stiles mark the point where a footpath crosses a boundary. The positions of these along a boundary are often of historic significance as footpaths can be of considerable antiquity.

Trackways - Track ways differ from hollow ways as they are not sunken below the level of the adjacent ground level. Historic track ways can still be traced as faint earthworks across a field, especially if under pasture.

(Lost trackway highlighted by snow, Rolvenden (©Sue Saggers))

Wood Bank -** An earth bank indicating the limit of a wood or coppice.

Unimproved grassland

Grassland with a high proportion of herbs which have not normally been treated with mineral fertiliser. Usually used for pasture or hay. Soil disturbance from ploughing tends to be minimal and ant hills can be common.

(Unimproved grassland, Whiligh)

Veteran Marker Trees

Old trees located in hedgerows to mark key points such as gate ways and foot paths or as a guide across the field. If the boundary is a parish boundary or joins with a woodland edge a marker tree may have been left to identify the area. Trees were managed in different ways to hedges to distinguish them and pro-long their life. (The definition of veteran and ancient trees is given in David Lonsdale 2013 Ancient Tree Management Handbook).

Pollard - The tree is pollarded i.e. cut back to about 2.5-3.0m high.

Stub - The tree is cut back to 1.0m high

Coppice - The tree is cut back to its base, re-growing as several stems that can grow to maturity.

(Coppice hornbeam on boundary lynchet marking the gateway and footpath on a public right of way, Attwater Farm)

Old laid hedge - Evidence of laying in a veteran tree is generally not an example of a marker tree, rather that the tree was part of a hedge which has undergone continued hand management over many years to maintain it in a stock-proof condition.

Virgate – variable measure depending on the soil quality but equivalent to quarter of a hide from 15 -60 acres, normally about 30 acres. The amount of land to support a family. Used for tax and or services assessment.

Yardland – the same as a virgate.

Yoke – Kent term for a virgate.

Appendix 2

Historic boundaries in the High Weald

Steve Podd (with additions by Nicola Bannister)

Introduction.

Most boundaries were created to subdivide land into spaces where crops could be grown, livestock reared and grass harvested in an organised way.

Historic boundaries are important for many reasons. They are

- an invaluable record of the past, informing us about political and administrative territories as well as individual landholdings;
- a huge component in every landscape and vitally significant in giving regions, such as the High Weald, their unique character;
- a reservoir of biodiversity, with older boundaries often providing a more stable habitat for rare and less mobile species;
- a valuable part of our national and local heritage.
- an archaeological resource preserving old ground surfaces, and stratified and buried remains of past land uses.

The landscape is a precious archive. It contains a vast array of man-made features, such as boundaries, which reflect the activities of its inhabitants over millennia. The most common perception of an ancient boundary is probably an old hedge containing lots of species but there is more to boundary value than the number of woody species.

In the past, it was considered essential for farmers and villagers to know exactly where their parish boundary was, for example, through beating the Bounds on Rogation Sunday or a parish boundary perambulation. Many administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries in the High Weald today were already in place in 1100 – and possibly many centuries before that – but not many of them will have hedges with an *average* of 9 or more species per 30 m stretch, if, indeed, they have a hedge at all.

The *underlying* component of any boundary, is likely to be the oldest part. For example, a hedge on the line of a bank and ditch may appear to be recent, but the underlying bank or adjacent ditch could easily be centuries old. A boundary should not be dismissed as unimportant just because it comprises a hedge with fewer than five species. **A hedge *may not* be 'important' in terms of the 1997 Hedgerow Regulations** (but remember there are other criteria to be considered), **but the boundary itself, its historical alignment and relationship with other historic features, could well be significant.** Understanding where former boundaries exist is also important in assessing the role of extant boundaries.

The creation of boundaries is a dynamic process, with new ones being added as old ones erode or are otherwise erased. It is important, therefore, to recognise those which are historically significant, and to highlight and protect them.
Boundaries often make use of existing natural features, such as rivers, streams or ridges, while many more follow man-made features such as field boundaries or roads. Nationally they exist in all sorts of

guises, but particularly in the form of ditches (wet or dry), banks, hedges, walls, and fences – and often as a combination of two or more of these. Occasionally a boundary will have no physical manifestation in the landscape, simply showing as a row of dots on a map often (to modern eyes) with no apparent logic to its route. Sometimes this is the result of the removal of the original boundary feature; sometimes it appears that the boundary has always been an imaginary line between prominent landscape features which may or may not still be extant. It may have been marked by boundary stones, stubbed or pollarded trees; or it may be that the physical component has long gone. Undefined boundaries often lie in unenclosed heaths, woodlands or where field re-organisation has taken place.

The **form and function** of a boundary can sometimes offer clues about its age. **Older boundaries are very often long and sinuous, with other boundaries butting up to them,** but not crossing over them. If field boundaries are cut obliquely by a linear feature such as a Roman road or a railway, it is reasonable to assume that the fields are older than the road or railway (although there are sometimes exceptions). **Ruler-straight boundaries tend to be comparatively recent** – perhaps no more than 300 or 350 years old. That is not to say they are unimportant.

Virtually all **civil** administrative units **(county, rape, lathe, hundred** and **manor)** and **ecclesiastical** ones **(diocese, archdeaconry, deanery** and **parish)** were in existence in this part of England by 1100, although some parishes in the High Weald were demarcated a century or so later. Within these administrative boundaries lie the farms, fields, commons, woods and parks which make up the local landscape. As well as the county boundaries of Kent, East and West Sussex and Surrey, the High Weald is cut by 'rape', 'lathe', diocesan and deanery boundaries, a considerable number of 'hundred', parish and manorial boundaries, and countless ancient farm and field boundaries (such as vigates, yardlands, ferlings), and routeways. In many instances these boundaries may coincide, but often, for example, the hundreds are cut through by rapes; parishes are divided by hundreds; manors and farms ignore parish boundaries, and so on. The result is a highly complex network of boundaries, anything but neat and tidy.

CIVIL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

County boundaries: **over 1400 years old.**

The county of Sussex has been more or less coterminous with the diocese of Chichester for over 1000 years, and both have long been divided in two. However, these ancient divisions are not concurrent: the (pre-1974) county boundary between East and West Sussex lies six to ten kilometres to the east of the boundary between the archdeaconries of Chichester and Lewes. The Kent boundary largely reflects the extent of the kingdom of Kent (616-825 AD), and could thus be well over 1400 years old. The Boundary between Kent and Sussex was not finally 'fixed' until the 19th century. Lamberhurst was once in Sussex.

Rape and lathe boundaries: **potentially over 1400 years old**.

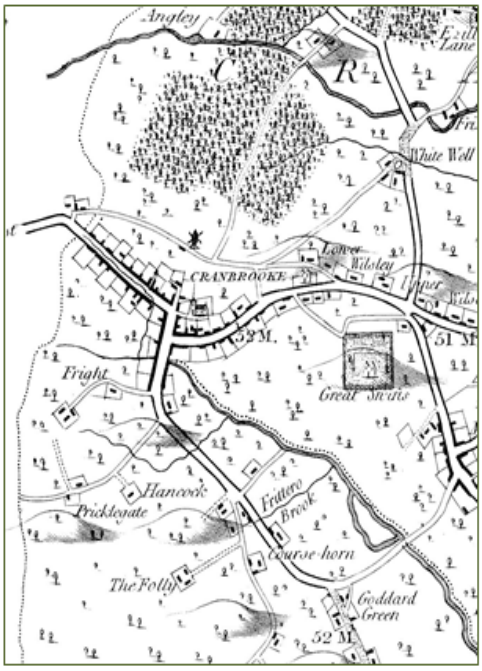
Late Saxon Sussex and Kent were divided into taxation and administrative units known as 'rapes' in Sussex and 'lathes' in Kent. In Kent, these divisions are said to represent the provinces of the Saxon kingdom, which was in existence between 616 and 825 AD. The original boundaries were devised in such a way that each lathe had access to the woodlands of the Weald. The lathes were revised in the

13th century, reducing their number from seven to five (Sutton at Hone, Aylesford, Scray, Shepway and St Augustine's), but they then remained intact until the 19th century.

Just prior to the compilation of Domesday Book (1086), Sussex was divided into five new rapes by the recently-arrived Norman overlords. We cannot be sure how closely these new divisions were modelled on the former Saxon units, and thus how many of the Saxon boundaries still survive, but we can work out with some accuracy the boundaries of the Norman rapes. These political divisions split the county into five by means of boundaries orientated approximately north-south. The boundary between Bramber and Lewes rapes also marks the (pre-1974) division of East and West Sussex. Mostly, rape boundaries respected parishes, but Heathfield, Mayfield and Wadhurst, for example, were cut in two by rape boundaries, and Benenden in Kent lay in two or more lathes, the boundaries of which appear to follow in part the Roman road which runs due north through Hemsted Park.

Hundred boundaries: **between 800 and 1200 years old**.

The rapes and lathes were themselves divided into 'hundreds', smaller groups of parishes (or sometimes parts of parishes – the boundaries were not always co-terminous), and taking their generic name from their nominal taxable value of 100 'hides'. The individual names of the hundreds often relate to the place where the hundred assembly met. Although the hundreds all had a central core, some of those in Sussex were cut by the rape boundaries, making them into 'half-hundreds', while many others had detached portions, giving them access to other resources such as woodland or different soils (see the note on parishes). In the main the division of the Kentish lathes into hundreds took place soon after 825, but in the Weald some hundreds were not finally established until the 13th century. The hundred boundaries were subject to change over time, and are no longer a unit of civil administration, but they have left a legacy of (mostly) identifiable boundaries, which we need to respect and preserve.



^ The likely course of the Hundred boundary on site, 2016

< The Hundred of Cranbrook, Edward Hasted, 1797

Manorial boundaries; **at least 1100 years old**.

Unlike the Midlands, where manor and parish were often coterminous, the High Weald model is very different. Some manors were large and extremely fragmented, while others were quite small. Identification of manorial boundaries can be difficult, and depends to a great extent on local knowledge and investigation. Where they are still extant in the landscape, their antiquity and importance needs to be recognised. One of the more well-known manorial boundaries in the High Weald is near Huggett's Furnace farm in Mayfield, which marks the boundary between the Royal manor of Rotherfield and the Archbishop of Canterbury's manor of South Malling. Both these manors are of mid-Saxon origin.

ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

Diocese, archdeaconry and deanery boundaries: **at least 1000–1400 years old**.
A **diocese** is the land under the administration of a cathedral. In Kent, the cathedrals of Canterbury and Rochester were founded in 597 and 604 respectively, while in Sussex, Chichester cathedral dates from 1075. In Sussex, the diocese of Chichester was split into two **archdeaconries –** those of Chichester and Lewes**.** These in turn were divided into twelve **deaneries**, which were possibly already in place in Sussex by 1075. In part, they correspond with the boundaries of the rapes but in others they are completely divergent. The medieval deaneries of Sussex were Boxgrove, Midhurst, Arundel, Storrington, Lewes, Pevensey, Dallington and Hastings, with the boundary between the archdeaconries of Chichester and Lewes coincidental with that between the deaneries of Storrington and Lewes. To complicate matters further, the deaneries of Pagham and Tarring, Plaistow, Horsham and South Malling were cut out of the neat picture of Sussex deaneries, as they fell under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury rather than the Bishop of Chichester. Such deaneries are alternatively known as '**peculiars**'. This leaves a complicated mesh of historic boundaries in the landscape. Again, we need to recognise them and look after them. In Kent, the main boundary between the two dioceses extended to the Kent Sussex border.

Parish boundaries: **over 1400 years old? At the very least 700!**
Today we make a distinction between 'Civil Parish' and 'Ecclesiastical Parish', and the two may or may not be coterminous. The word 'parish' was originally applied to an ecclesiastical unit, the land served by a church, and from which the church could exact tithes for the upkeep of the priest. Early 'mother' churches or minsters initially served a large area which was later sub-divided into smaller parishes as 'daughter' churches were founded. The territory of the minster was usually based on existing (and therefore much earlier) units of land holding, perhaps Roman, perhaps pre-Roman. By the Saxon period, these units seem to be royal estates or royal land that had been granted early on to the Church. Because of the wooded and underdeveloped nature of the High Weald at the time of the spread of Christianity, the minsters and parishes there are fewer and later than in other more accessible parts of the region. Hurstmonceux, Ewhurst, Peasmarsh and Rye were all minsters, but there were seemingly no others in the more remote parts of the High Weald, either in Kent or Sussex. In Kent the Saxon churches mentioned in Domesday lie on the edge of the High Weald except for Benenden church.

It is impossible to date parish boundaries precisely. Where Anglo-Saxon charters (dating between about 650AD and 1050AD), exist for English parishes, the boundary described then is, in a large number of instances, the boundary we still see today. Evidence from the pre-Christian era is very

sparse, but in isolated instances it has been reasonably speculated that some current parish (and other) boundaries were functioning in the Roman period or even earlier, making them over 2000 years old. In the High Weald, early (7th century) settlement was restricted to remote farmsteads and hamlets, many of which retain their Anglo-Saxon names to this day, but the grouping of these scattered holdings into parishes was comparatively late, generally after 1100, but certainly more or less complete by 1300. One notable feature about parish boundaries in Sussex and Kent is that the Downland parishes are often elongated in shape (to give them access to land both on and below the Downs), as well as quite small, whereas the Wealden parishes tend to be large and sub-rectangular.

Up until 1882 many parishes were not in one neat ring-fence, but had 'detached' portions a lesser or greater distance away. These satellites may have been areas of woodland, meadow or pasture, where such resources were limited or missing from the parish core. These detached areas are Manorial in origin, which then became claimed by parishes. Ultimately many detached portions lost their original significance, and in 1882 the Divided Parishes Act swept most of them away. Further tidying of parish boundaries took place with the 1974 Local Government Act. Despite these Acts, the physical boundaries may still be extant in the landscape, and where they do, the principle should be to recognise and retain them.

FARM AND FIELD

Farm boundaries: **many are well over 450 years old.** Farms with medieval origins may show evidence of a ring fence around the core farm/settlement which could date from the early medieval period but further research is needed. The early Wealden wood-pasture summer farms ('dens' and 'folds') were not static entities in the landscape. As ever larger areas of woodland and waste were cleared, a pioneer farm might be subdivided between heirs, and what started as one farm then developed into a group of farms or a hamlet. The main period of woodland clearance, running in tandem with a growth in the population, was between about 1050 and the eve of the Black Death in 1348. Thereafter, until the rise of the early Tudor yeoman class, much cleared land reverted to woodland again. However, many of the early farms survived throughout; we have identified over 500 'den' names in the Kentish Weald alone, a remarkable continuity. In the western part of the Weald, 'dens' become 'folds', and the modern map attests to a strong survival of these too.

Like hundreds, manors and parishes, individual farms in the High Weald were often fragmented, holding outlying parcels of meadow, pasture, woodland or arable. However, map evidence from the 17th century onwards suggests that such fragmentation was much less pronounced by then, and by the 19th century, many Wealden farms were ring fenced. A farm boundary can therefore comprise features of many types and ages.

Until the 20th century, 17th century farm boundaries generally remained quite stable. Whenever farms were sold or re-let, the 'traditional' boundaries of the unit were usually respected and perpetuated. The 20th century saw an increasingly popular trend to sell farms by lot, or to sell off the odd field or two, rather than sell the entire holding. The main result of this has been to violate the old farm boundary. Often, if fields were sold to the neighbouring farm, the boundary between them could possibly be removed, erasing the old division without any thought for its historic significance. In general, the High Weald has fared better than some parts of the country, but nevertheless a good number of historic boundaries have been lost this way. As the older boundaries tend to display more biodiversity than more recent ones, it is important that we recognise the older farm boundaries and promote their retention and sound management.

Field boundaries: **of many different ages.**
Historically speaking field boundaries are generally more fluid than farm boundaries, being retained, altered or erased according to changing economic demands, land use and advances in scientific knowledge, e.g. improved methods of drainage. A single farm can display field boundaries dating from a number of different eras. Some English field boundaries have been shown to be extremely old, for example the so-called 'co-axial' fields of parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, and the 'reaves' of Dartmoor, both of which may be pre-Roman.

The High Weald is an area of 'ancient countryside', that is, the landscape consists of fields created by clearing areas of woodland and scrub, a process known as 'assarting', and which, in the High Weald, led in Saxon times to the creation of hundreds of 'dens' or wood-pasture summer farms (initially temporary, later occupied all year-round) where pigs were grazed into the autumn. The boundaries resulting from assarting are usually very irregular and erratic, and in later centuries were allowed to develop thick hedges or boundaries in the form of woodland ribbons known as 'shaws' or 'rews'. The High Weald was never an area of 'open fields' with strip fields and 'ridge and furrow'. There was a trend up to the mid- 16th century for fields and farms to be divided between heirs ('gavelkind' inheritance), but thereafter alternative employment reduced the need for sub-division.

While most of the High Weald comprises irregular fields dating from the medieval period, old maps provide evidence for a limited amount of boundary rationalisation from the 17th century onwards. This occurred mainly on the larger farms. For instance, a 1637 map of Combwell Priory in Goudhurst shows large fields subdivided with straight post and rail fences. Over time, hedge plants colonised the fence lines, creating fields with straight hedges. The same process is still visible today where post and rail is used to create small paddocks within a field.

Many historic field boundaries were erased over time, particularly in the third quarter of the 19th and second half of the 20th century. Many shaws also disappeared. However, the effect is not as devastating in the High Weald as in some parts of the country.

Despite the passing of the Hedgerow Regulations in 1997, threats to field boundaries still exist. As with farm boundaries, they are potentially vulnerable if sold to a neighbouring holding or property. If the field is built over as a housing development, the native hedge is often removed altogether or replaced by inappropriate hedges comprising non-native ornamental species. Such developments should be encouraged to respect and retain their surrounding boundaries and species.

Farmstead and curtilage boundaries: **generally developed in the last 400 years, although individual farmstead sites may have been occupied for six or seven centuries or longer**.

Farmstead and curtilage boundaries (i.e. those around the farmhouse and in and around the farmyard) reflect the economic status and fortunes of the farm holding over time. Most farms, large and small alike, will have ventured into new crops or different types of livestock over the centuries. This may have required new buildings for housing livestock or storing and processing crops, and these may have required an extension to the farmyard. This is particularly true of the second half of the 20th century where large portal frame buildings or intensive livestock buildings have been added, but can often be seen in the High Weald when oast houses (and cattle sheds) proliferated in the 19th century. The progressive development of the farmstead in this way is an important historical record, and therefore where it has not been completely erased in recent times, all efforts should be made to retain it.

One important thing to remember is that farmsteads in general were, and are, essentially 'open plan'; the principal physical divisions being between the farmhouse and the yards, and around livestock yards. Often the buildings themselves form the boundaries, e.g. cattle shelter shed ranges on two or more sides of a yard. The current surge in the conversion of traditional farm buildings, especially to residential use, has led in many cases to inappropriate subdivision of former open spaces. This is often accompanied by equally inappropriate ornamental planting and a general 'suburbanisation' of the farmstead, which can further erode its character.

Where diversification and conversion are necessary, the overriding principle must be to retain traditional boundaries in and around the farmstead. If subdivision is absolutely necessary, simple, open post-and-rail fencing is usually far more appropriate than solid brick walls, panel fencing and hedges (especially those comprising non-indigenous species), as it helps retain the feeling of openness and therefore the historic character of the farmstead.

ROADS AND TRACKS; **Roman times onwards**.
A number of Wealden parishes use routeways to form part of their boundary, and within the parish farms are often bordered by roads and lanes. Indeed, it has been recognised that the siting of many farms and settlements in the Weald has been strongly influenced by the pre-existing road network. Perhaps the first recognisable routes in the High Weald are Roman roads. The principal routes affecting the High Weald were the 'Greensand Way', running east – west from Pevensey to Pulborough. At Pulborough it linked into 'Stane Street', a main road leading from Chichester to London. Further east, other roads leading to London teed off the Greensand way at Hassocks and Lewes, both passing through the heart of the High Weald. In the Kentish part of the High Weald was another north-south road which linked a group of Wealden iron works to the Roman town of Rochester. Clearly there must have been many other minor Roman routes which are no longer recognisable as such; many of them will still be in use today. It has been estimated that no Roman iron bloomery site (of which there were hundreds in the Weald) was further than 3.5km from a known Roman road. The Roman Road from the Sussex border north towards Rochester runs through Benenden, it branches in Hemsted Park with another heading north east towards Ashford and

probably the Romano-British and Roman settlement at Westhawk Farm. Where the road traverses the southern part of Benenden, the field pattern respects it and is aligned to it.

Many droveways in the Weald are believed to have originated in Roman times or earlier. Iron Age exploitation of the Weald, resulted in links between iron producing areas and hillforts, for example the droveway through Bedgebury Forest from the Royal Manor of Wye. The Saxons would have used these routes to access the High Weald wood pastures ('dens' and 'folds') with their pigs, as well as establishing other drove roads of their own. Centuries of use have often caused considerable erosion, turning lengths of these routes into 'sunken' lanes. A few are surfaced lanes today; most are still rights of way of some sort – in fact, many of today's footpaths began life as 'proper' roads. Where they are unsurfaced, some of these lanes are very wet and subject to erosion through running water or poaching. In order to help reduce erosion and retain the character of these routes, the objective should be, where possible, to let in light and wind to aid drying (in the past many had laid hedges rather than the tall, free-growing hedges of today which tend to exclude sun and wind); and to restrict use by unsuitable or illegal traffic (four wheel drives, motorcycles, horses and cycles), especially in wet weather.

The period between about 1700 and the 1840s saw the improvement of many Wealden roads, through re-surfacing, re-alignment and, occasionally, completely new stretches of road. This work was undertaken by the Turnpike Trusts, who were able to exact tolls to pay for the improvements. The difficulty of traffic passing in winter on the clay resulted in some of the very wide tracks bounded by banks and ditches to allow for the rutting. These were narrowed when metalled and often bounded by later banks leaving the older boundary preserved in woodland or commons. The roadside strip if wide enough may have allowed for small cottages to be erected (purpresture) with the previous track boundary forming the rear boundary of the property.

In the 1840s the first railways were routed through the Weald, and others were added as the century progressed. Both turnpikes and railways added new boundaries to the landscape. Mid-20th century closures mean that many railways survive as landscape 'ghosts', punctuated by cuttings and embankments.

Where wide routes once existed – and some in the Weald were up to 50 metres wide - today only a narrow ribbon of tarmac is required. The wide verges (which, as well as affording grazing, enabled travellers of old to pick the driest path) may now be open or covered by trees or scrub. The main threat to these verges comes from their annexation by adjoining landowners, ultimately leading to their incorporation into a garden or field, often accompanied by the planting of a new roadside hedge and the destruction of the original (usually banked and hedged) boundary behind.

WOODS, PARKS , COMMONS AND MARSH

Woodland boundaries: **boundaries can be of all dates, but those of designated Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland are, by definition, over 400 years old.**

The majority of woodland in the High Weald is designated as 'Ancient', that is, it has been in existence since before 1600. Because of the importance of woodland for timber, fuel and fodder,

steps were taken to ensure that grazing and browsing animals were kept out, or at least regulated, enabling coppice and standard trees alike to grow unhindered. Thus, many ancient woods had a deep ditch dug around the perimeter, with the excavated soil forming an internal bank. The bank would originally have been topped by a stock proof hedge or fence. Many wood boundaries are today characterised by ancient, grotesquely-shaped remnants of formerly laid hedges (often hornbeam). Where divisions were required within the wood, often to demarcate ownership, but sometimes to mark a parish boundary, pollards or 'stubs' (mini pollards), types of tree not usually found in woods, were sometimes used to supplement a bank and / or ditch. Pollards are sometimes found on external boundaries of woods too.

Maintenance of these banks and ditches has often lapsed nowadays, but it is nevertheless important that, where they still survive, these historic boundaries are respected and retained. The main threats are from levelling or erosion by men and vehicles (for example, when a new entrance is made into the wood), and through erosion by burrowing animals, wind-thrown trees and careless timber extraction.

Park boundaries: **eleventh century onwards**.
In the medieval period there were over 100 parks in the Weald, including about 50 in the High Weald. They were situated mainly on poorer soils, and were typically 100-150 acres in size. Many of these were disparked over the centuries, especially before about 1700, but their outline may still survive on maps and on the ground as a 'ghost'. The subdivision following disparking is often typified by straight boundaries (for example Glassenbury Deer park in Goudhurst). In addition to the medieval parks, there are a number of later 'landscape' parks. Medieval parks usually had a deep ditch along their boundary, and sometimes an external bank (unlike woods, which have an internal bank). Around the park perimeter (on the bank if there was one) would run a thick hedge or a 'pale' (a tall wooden fence), designed to prevent deer escaping from the park. The best surviving example is Eridge Old Park, which was already a park in 1086, and remained so until 1956, when part was brought under the plough. The obvious threats to park boundaries are the erosion of the bank and ditch, or the removal of a length of the perimeter, thus destroying the historic outline.

Forests, commons and greens: **thirteenth century onwards**.
Like parks, the 'forest' areas of the Weald (St Leonard's, Worth, Ashdown, Waterdown, Dallington and the Frith) were demarcated by a ditch and external bank and pale, enclosing (in the 13th century) some 50,000 acres. These areas were the Royal hunting grounds, over which certain common rights existed, and which would have contained much open ground as well as separately enclosed woodlands. The boundary earthworks associated with the forests were impressive: Ashdown Forest, empaled before 1273 with a large bank and ditch, comprised some 15,000 acres of land, requiring a pale of well over 20 miles. A good proportion of this still survives. The forests were gradually enclosed with straight boundaries dominated by thorn species.

Elsewhere were scores of smaller commons and greens, in the form of pastures or wood-pastures and general roadside 'waste', the edges of which were settled in or by the early 13th century. In the southern part of the High Weald, areas of common formed an almost continuous chain along the Heathfield – Burwash and Heathfield – Battle ridges, in a strip averaging about a kilometre wide.

Much of this and the former forests was enclosed in and after the 17th century, and can often be recognised by comparatively straight and regular field boundaries created at that time.

Marsh: **12th century onwards.**

The reclaimed marshes in the very south eastern end of the High Weald retain several historic boundary features very different from those in the wooded parts. In particular, embankments which delineate the various phases of the 'inning' of marshland, and old relict ditches which survive as shallow channels within enlarged grassland fields. Many of these relic ditches can be equated with field divisions on early 17th century maps, for example, in the area to the south of Blackbrook Farm in Wittersham. The initial reclamation was carried out between the 12th century and the 15th, but storm breaches and flooding caused major renovation work to be undertaken at different times, for example, when the Wittersham Levels were flooded in the early 17th century and not reclaimed again until after 1670.

The main threat to the relict ditches is that of ploughing, although much of the survival is related to the fact that many such grasslands are too wet to plough. Silted ditches are of considerable archaeological potential, preserving stratified deposits sealing artefacts in context. Where they remain water-logged palaeo-archaeological remains may also be preserved.