DISCOVERING OUR LOCAL FOOTPATHS (CROCKENHILL & EYNSFORD)

1 You enjoy walking, but have you ever paused to consider how and why footpaths developed, and the story behind the routes they took? This presentation explores these questions to find answers to help us to understand our footpaths better and to appreciate them even more.

2 Crockenhill, until 1987 lay within ancient parish of Eynsford, and has an unusually complex network of footpaths. This network is a legacy of history, and the reasons for this can be used to understand the origins of footpaths elsewhere, but not necessarily all coming together as for Crockenhill, or with the same emphasis. Once tracks for feet, horse and horse-drawn vehicles, the most regularly used developed into lanes and roads.

3 Footpaths and tracks arose for the following reasons:-

- To give access to essential resources
- To create links within settlements
- To link local communities
- To provide routes for trade
- To serve as routes to sacred places
- To mark boundaries or established paths along boundaries

To give access to essential resources

4 Flints were resources needed by Stone Age man and large pieces of flint were to be found lying on the hill tops at Crockenhill. A favourite site for knapping large flints into tools was at Shelmore – near the junction between two footpaths, which I imagine might have been trodden by early man. Here are some of the boxes of flints found by farmer Sydney Lee and deposited in Dartford Museum. They include large items such as hammer stones.

5 This is a footpath to Chalkhurst Wood above Eynsford – looking west. The pylons on the sky-line are along the M25. Woodlands provided vital communal resources, though the lord of the manor often reserved timber for himself– firewood, wood for repairs, animal fodder could be used by manorial tenants. This led to footpaths leading to and from woodland in regular use, but now providing leisure walkers with a dead-end path. The east side of the Darent Valley has examples of these, while a different pattern evolved on the east side.

6 There were no significant settlements beyond Eynsford in Knatts Valley, so footpaths did not need to be extended beyond the woodland. However, on the west side people came up from both the Darent and Cray valleys to the upland between so paths could be connected. Access to pasture and to woodland led to well-trodden footpaths.

You might be familiar with the den system of the weald, but less familiar with a similar smaller system which operated in the Orpington/ St. Mary Cray area , though clues of ‘dens’ persist in place names such as Ramsden, Walden, Hockenden and Tubbenden. Historian Alan Everitt has worked out a pastoral system which involved the upland area between the Cray and Darent valleys. Animals were driven to woodland for autumn acorns and beechnuts, and to the uplands in the summer where, though wooded, areas of chalk grassland were to be found.

7 In the valleys water was abundant, but very limited in the upland downs. In Crockenhill a natural spring created a pond became the focal point of several tracks. The

pond was filled in in 1900, and the shops built, but note the curved pavement following the outline of the pond, and the width of the road by the pond. Herds of cattle or flocks of sheep created this 'Broadway' as it is known to this day. This photo from 1880s shows the pond with the blacksmith and wheelwright's forge beyond. The village green then had a pair of cottages on it – derelict in 1918 and burnt down as part of the victory celebrations after the 1st World War.

To create links within settlements

8 The map of 1802 shows the pond and the broad way and how the roads radiate from this point. Quite unlike neighbouring valley ribbon settlements, such as Eynsford and Farningham which spread long main road routes as ribbon development.

To link local communities

9 In medieval times some roads were declared 'King's highways' to be maintained by local communities. Footpath 188 from Harvestway and ending up in Eynsford was one such 'Highway' which reverted to a footpath when the road from St. Mary Cray to Eynsford developed passing the pond. Note the sunken path eroded by many feet creating banks each side.

10 This map shows the contour lines around Crockenhill, which lay on a ridge between the Cray and Darent Valleys. Ridgeways were used for long distance routes because hill tops were often more open and less liable to flood and be drier. There was a mini ridgeway from Dartford (still called the Top Road) which continued through Crockenhill southwards towards Chelsfield. This contour map shows the ridge and the north/south direction of the road – in Crockenhill called Daltons Road, after an C18th farming family.

11 This view is from Daltons Road westward. There is a clear view from ridge towards London – Orpington in trees. Canary Wharf skyscrapers and Shooters Hill are on the skyline.

To provide routes for trade

12 Many routes were trade routes along which packhorses carried goods – Daltons Road was actually referred to as a pack way in a document of 1778.

13 Such routes became embedded into the landscape – lined by banks and thick hedges. Soil eroded downside so height difference between field and road several metres above. While on the up-side the hedge held back soil raising land and creating a bank down to road. The creation of an open route often led to it being used to mark boundaries – this stretch of Daltons road is also part of the Hundred of Axstane boundary and a parish boundary between Orpington (left) and Lullingstone (right). Anglo-Saxon pre-1066 administrative creations.

To mark boundaries or established paths along boundaries

14 Hundreds and Lathes were administrative areas set up by the Anglo-Saxons – a Hundred roughly comprising one hundred families. Lengths of the boundaries of Axstane Hundred and of Codsheath Hundred now lie in Crockenhill parish

15 The antiquity of some routes in the landscape is shown by their use as boundaries. The yellow line indicates the boundaries of Hundreds – administrative units from Anglo-Saxon times. Daltons Road formed part of the boundary between the Hundred of Ruxley (left) and the Hundred of Axstane (right). The boundary between the Hundred of Axstane

and of Codsheath lay through Lullingstone Park, where part of the boundary bank and ditch remain.

16 This is the Hundred bank and ditch boundary running through Lullingstone Park – the lower land is in the Hundred of Codsheath, and the higher in the Hundred of Axstane.

To serve as routes to sacred places

17 More routes ran west/east than north/south. Several have developed into roads e.g. routes A and D. Route B did not reach this status, but is interesting because locally it was known as Pilgrims way and runs from St. Mary Cray via East Hall, Lullingstone Park, Shoreham to Otford where it joins the main Pilgrims Way running along the southern foothills of the Downs. Red dashes footpaths not shown on the map.

18 View from near Darns Hill Cottages west towards East Hall.

19 Continuation along track from Darns Hill to Shelmore – ahead this is where the flints were found by Sydney Lee.

20 Where 'Pilgrims Way' crosses the 9-hole golf course in Lullingstone Park.

Footpaths and Deer Parks

21 The very fact that a footpath used by the public ran through the exclusive status symbol of a private deer park points to the footpath pre-dating the deer park, which was enclosed to keep deer in and the public out. Owners of Lullingstone Castle did not manage to have the footpath diverted because of its use as a route of pilgrimage. The deer fence and ladder stile were new in 1888. The netting was to keep rabbits in (they were bred in rabbit warrens) so not to harm farmers' crops. Shown here is the last gamekeeper, George Reeves and daughter Mildred, in the 1920s.

22 The exclusivity of deer parks is underlined by creation of footpaths round their perimeter. After the deer park was enclosed, probably in the C14th, the high fence excluded the general public, who might have previously had access across the land. The deer had to be kept in and poachers kept out. People had to walk round the deer park to travel, and access to the deer fence was required to repair the fence.

23 Footpath 203 runs along the north side of Lullingstone Park – Eynsford in distance. There are ancient ash pollards along the side of the park. Ash was used to repair the fence.

Past diversion

24 Influential, wealthy landowners could help shape the footpath network. Although the family at Lullingstone had to accept the Pilgrims Way, in the C18th and C19th the Hart Dykes had several footpaths and even roads diverted. The main road along the Darent Valley originally ran past the front of Lullingstone Castle. In 1861 aided by the fact that the A225 had been upgraded into a turnpike road, they were able to close the road in front of the Castle. This affected the road through the park which ran from Orpington to Lullingstone which fell into disuse, and this lower end is now not even recognised as an official footpath.

Footpaths and Parish boundaries

25 Crockenhill was border country. Settlements developed in the valleys, and parishes were given an east/west cross section of land with allocation of different resources – river

meadows, arable land, woodlands and higher ground. The parishes along the Cray stretched east to the chalk upland and those of the Darent Valley stretched west. They met along the ridge where Crockenhill developed. ‘Shelmore’ in the past 'Shelmer' (from mere in this case meaning boundary) is a boundary and at the corner 3 parishes met – Lullingstone, St Mary Cray, Orpington

26 Until 1412 (permanently 1712) there were 2 small parishes (now one) Lullingstaine and Lullingstone – here shows how the boundaries of Lullingstaine were etched into the landscape by footpaths that followed them. The M25 and modern farming requirements have led to alteration along part of the routes, but sections follow the original ancient line – dating back to Anglo-Saxon times when parishes were created.

27 This beech pollard near The Gables, off Daltons Road, was an ancient boundary marker between Lullingstaine and Orpington.

28 Here, with The Gables is in the background, at the entrance off Daltons Road 3 parishes met – Lullingstaine, Orpington and Lullingstone. The hedge was the boundary of Orpington Parish, and the continuation of the footpath from the camera viewpoint marked the NW corner of Lullingstone parish, where it met Orpington and Lullingstaine. The coal post 1861 marks this. Coal posts were set up to mark the boundary of parishes into London. Coal passing this boundary had to pay a tax when it was sold in The City. The money went towards building the London embankment along the Thames under which the new sewerage ran. This was designed by Bazelgette with an outfall at Crossness near Woolwich, south of the Thames, with another outfall north of the Thames at Beckton, Barking.

29 Footpath 203 was the boundary between Lullingstaine (to north) and Lullingstone (to south) parish boundary. This view is looking north towards Highcroft Hall and the distinctive Wellingtonia trees – giant redwoods planted in Victorian times (1880s). Trees there mark the north Lullingstaine parish boundary with Eynsford. This photo therefore shows the whole width of Lullingstaine at this point.

30 Close-up of same with Swanley beyond.

Creation of new routes

31 Reasons for new routes

- Access for leisure
- Long distance paths
- Routes disrupted by new infrastructure

The local footpath network has examples of all these, as would other areas with different emphasis. This is part of the Darent Valley footpath between Lullingstone Castle and Lullingstone Park Visitors Centre. Money from the £3 million fund allocated to the Darent Valley Landscape Project has been used to widen the path and stabilise the river bank.

32 The new railway line London via Swanley and beyond in the 1860s disrupted several footpaths. Farmland was severed. Here at Bournewood, a farm crossing on the approach to Swanley was put in. It is seen here on 11 March 1899 at 11.47 am. Thanks to railway buffs the background to this photo has been revealed. It is the royal train taking Queen Victoria to Folkestone for the Channel crossing and thence to Biarritz on the west French coast (Windsor to Folkestone – then to Boulogne). The train is being pulled by a Great Western Railway locomotive, which would not usually run on this line. Every minute of its route was

scheduled and it was due here at 11.47 am – hence children and others knew when the gather to watch the Queen pass by. Below how we cross the line today – the new overhead section of the footbridge was put up in 2020 on the 1930s superstructure.

33 The level crossing is still there at Eynsford though plans for diversion are being discussed. The viaduct was constructed in 1862. It has nine arches made from bricks from a brickfield opened in a field by the river for the purpose. The population of Eynsford rose by 300 in 1861. The increase included navvies on the line to construct the tunnel and viaduct, as well as those working in the brickfield.

34 The M25 construction caused great disruption to local paths. Many were diverted towards the two underpasses. At Park Gate one was diverted along the north line of the motorway onto Park Gate Road leaving sections on the south side dead-ends to the M25. Extinguishing footpaths is so difficult that these 'obsolete' paths have been left. One new footpath gained was along the farm track between the underpasses. Dick Savill, first chairman of the Rights of Way Group, fought hard to have it designated as a footpath and the inspector at the M25 inquiry agreed, but it took KCC several years before getting round to it. This is now dubbed Savill Row in honour of Dick. M25 construction scene is looking south from Wested Lane junction with Eynsford Road.

35 It is easy to take our footpaths for granted but the proposed new Local Plan threatens the routes of several footpaths at Petham Court and at Pedham Place and the countryside through which they pass. Here is the site of the proposed Wasps stadium and associated development. The fight is on to preserve our countryside through which we walk.

36 I would like to end by paying tribute to my husband, Ken, who succeeded Dick Savill as Chairman. When we came to Crockenhill in 1976 there were no waymarks, no lines of paths through crops, and it was difficult to find one's way along any route. Ken waymarked all the paths, and when he retired in 1984 he begun the Monday morning walks to cover all the footpaths in the parishes of Eynsford and Crockenhill. The walks started modestly with 3 to 6 walkers, but within years 30-40 walkers turned up and walks were started in Eynsford as well. In those 40 years, following Ken we have had Roger Smith, Alan Hayward and now Bob Brickell as excellent and dedicated walks co-ordinators and leaders. They give time beforehand preparing the walk and turn out in all weathers to lead them. Without such people, and we need more of them, our Group would not be as successful or walks as enjoyable as they are