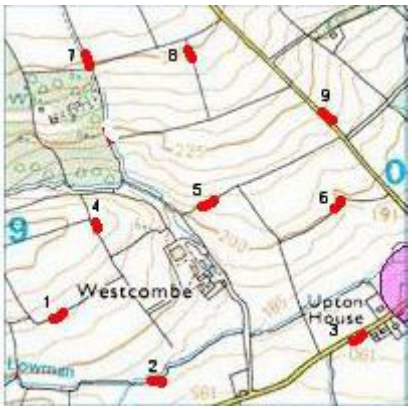
HUNTSHAM HEDGEROW FIELD SURVEYS

Hedgelink, http://www.hedgelink.org.uk/hedgelink/, the national organisation that promotes interest in native hedgerow conservation and management, has teamed up with DEFRA to produce a Handbook defining a standard way of recording hedgerows http://www.hedgelink.org.uk/hedgelink/hedgerow-research-and-surveys.htm#Hedgerow_survey_database_24. Its focus is on the biodiversity, of hedgerows but it also takes account of the importance of hedgerows for farming and their contribution to the beauty of our countryside and to our history and culture. The survey method produces accurate information about the state of hedgerows at a local level, about the main influences on their condition, and what needs to be done to maintain or restore them.

Knowing from previous trial surveys that hedges around Huntsham are the traditional Devon bank type and that they are extraordinarily diverse Huntsham Society decided to do a formal survey following DEFRA's procedure. We hoped that this would allow us to characterise and classify our hedges within a national database. The survey was completed and the results entered into the database in 2010 and 2011.

Following the procedure we selected nine 30m hedge Sections within a 1km^2 block immediately north and west of Huntsham.



We recorded the hedgerow type according to its structure; adjacent land use; height of perennial herbaceous vegetation as an indication of grazing effects; shape and dimensions of hedgerow and its management history; isolated tree species; hedge woody species as a percentage; the ground flora and any veteran trees.

The results are very interesting. To summarise, with minor exceptions all nine Sections are in 'favourable condition' according to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, indicating good management. All the hedges have the same basic bank structure, are regularly trimmed and dense and were probably constructed in the same historical period. Emergent trees spared from trimming are not a consistent feature. Each of the nine Sections has a markedly different species composition, however. This could reflect the use of different planting materials at the time of construction and/or different rates of colonisation by different species, depending on natural events such as seed dispersal by birds or intervention by human activities, directly and indirectly. Whichever were the most influential they have resulted in an astonishing mix of woody species. Just five woody species in a hedge would qualify it as species-rich but, with the exception of Section 6, all the Sections have at least 10 and as many as 14 species.

We also looked at the whole hedgerow that each Section is in (defined as terminating at its junction with another hedge) to get an idea of how representative each Section is of the whole hedgerow. This shows that in the Huntsham area at least, where the fields are small and hedgerows short, a 30m Section is not adequate to capture the whole range of species. In each of the nine hedgerows concerned there are a

minimum of 12 woody species and as many as 17 species in two of them. In other words our hedges are 'super-rich'!

The woody climbers bramble, dog rose, honeysuckle and ivy occur nearly throughout and most Sections are dominated by blackthorn, hawthorn, hazel and holly. Surprisingly, it seems to be only the roadside hedgerows that contain much beech, except where some strengthening or gap-filling might have taken place. Roadside hedges also contain recently acquired species such as turkey oak and yew. Residual clumps of elm have survived elm disease in a few places.

The following are summaries of each Section:

Hedge Section 1 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank, species-rich, dominated by Blackthorn and Hawthorn with 9 subordinate woody species'.
In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 3 woody species.

Hedge Section 2 can be described as 'untrimmed, full hedge-bank, flanked by stream and shallow ditch, with many emergent trees, species-rich, dominated by Hawthorn with 10 subordinate woody species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 2 woody species.

Hedge Section 3 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, half hedge-bank, species-rich, dominated by Blackthorn with 9 subordinate species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 2 woody species.

Hedge Section 4 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank, species-rich, dominated by Holly and Blackthorn with 9 subordinate woody species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 4 woody species.

Hedge Section 5 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank, species-rich, dominated by Hawthorn and Hazel overall but with Beech occupying nearly half of side A (possibly planted to reinforce weak Section), and with 7 subordinate woody species. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 6 woody species.

Hedge Section 6 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank with dry ditch to one side, species-rich, dominated by Hawthorn and Bramble with 4 subordinate woody species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 10 woody species.

Hedge Section 7 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank with wet ditch to one side, species-rich, dominated by Beech with 13 subordinate woody species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 3 woody species.

Hedge Section 8 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank with isolated trees, species-rich, dominated by Holly and Blackthorn with 8 subordinate woody species'. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 5 woody species.

Hedge Section 9 can be described as 'trimmed and dense, full hedge-bank with isolated trees, species-rich and dominated by Sycamore and Beech with 8 subordinate woody species. In the full hedgerow that the Section is part of there are an additional 7 woody species.

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