



**An Article in the Bardfield Times, December 2021.
Black Lane is part of the eastern Little Bardfield
Parish Boundary with Great Bardfield.
It runs from Charity Farm on the Dunmow Road to
Pauls Croft on Bell Lane.**

A sleeping beauty is brought back to life

For many residents of Great Bardfield, Black Lane is a line of trees, from Charity Farm to Paul's Farm, at the back of the fields on your left as you enter the village from Dunmow.

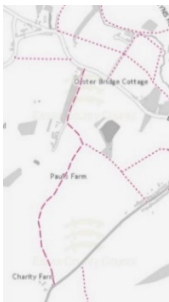
This impressive, ancient green lane is a bridleway which has been impossible to walk and enjoy until its knights in shining armour from the Friends of the Flitch Way spent eight weeks and 200 hours of their time turning back the years of neglect and bringing it back to life.

Please do take the time to follow in the footsteps of our ancestors once more.

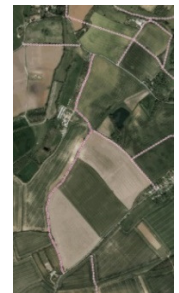
The Parish Council are consulting with the PROW team at Essex about how to improve the access and drainage so the path near Charity Farm is accessible in all weathers.

The years of lack of maintenance meant that the exact location of the track was hard to discern so a delve into the cartographic record was required – and what a rich and varied story this important thoroughfare had to tell.

We start at the end, the present day, and work back to the late mediaeval years but for the moment must leave the beginnings in the mists of time still to be researched.



Modern satellites and the internet, courtesy of ECC & Ordnance Survey, show us the distinctive shape of Black Lane - starting on the Dunmow Road at Charity Farm, arcing towards Paul's Farm, followed by a double right-angled turn before continuing to Bell Lane.



Taking our lead from these technological marvels, Ordnance Survey past editions start our journey back in time.



1955

70 years and very little has changed with major landmarks still the same. Black Lane and the surrounding footpaths are clearly marked. A few new field boundaries have appeared.

30 years earlier and Paul's Farm has become Cracknell's Farm. Some of our current residents have memories of this name.

The importance of water in the wider landscape is represented by the large pond, marked at the junction near Charity Farm. This forms the headwaters for the Bardfield Brook which ultimately makes an entrance in the village by the Fountain

Astute observers will note that the parish boundary has changed. More of this later.



1924

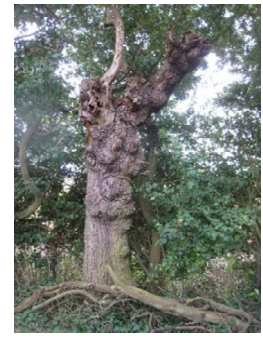


1881

140 years and the smallholding on Bell Lane is known as Paul's Farm rather than being referred to as a set of cottages.

The importance of trees at this time is reflected in their representation within the hedgerows.

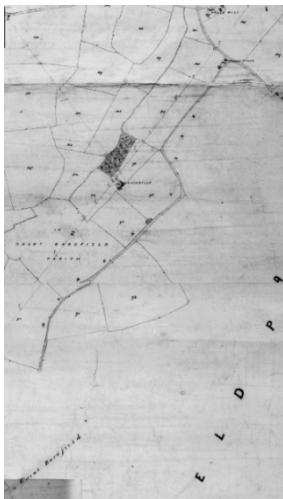
Mention was made earlier about the parish boundary which crosses the large field and whose junction with Black Lane is marked by an oak pollard. Could the dead oak pollard pictured be the one mentioned – it is in the right place



Oak pollard

These printed Ordnance Survey maps give us a modern, industrial age view of the Bardfield landscape and use conventions which we readily recognise. Now we have to rely on the hand drawn and coloured maps that have miraculously survived in our public record offices. These were surveyed by individuals riding on horseback, living in the community for months whilst using chains and a notebook to record their observations.

The 180 year old tithe maps, surveyed and drawn by James Beadel of Witham, give us a glimpse into older traditions. Two maps are required as each parish had its own tithe map and much of Black Lane formed the boundary between Great and Little Bardfield. The gaps at the southern end reflect the piecemeal arrangement of the parishes at this time.



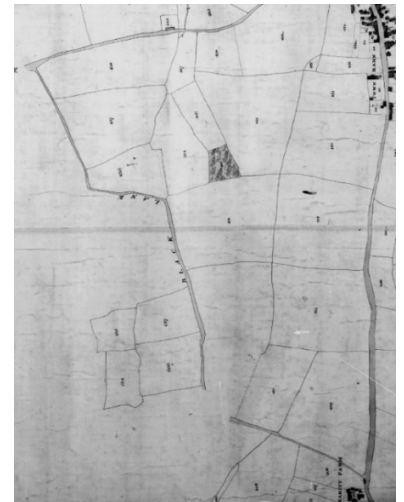
1838 Little Bardfield

The importance of Black Lane as a thoroughfare is clearly shown as it is depicted in exactly the same style as the Dunmow Road and Bell Lane. The junction with Bell Lane was called Paul's Cross.

The pond at Charity Farm also warranted inclusion.

From the accompanying apportionments, we know who owned the farms - Charity Farm (Parish of Bardfield, Trustee Rev B Lampett); Town Barn (Dorcas Smith); Place Farm (James Pasmore); Cracknell's Farm (John Tabor); Paul's & Wainsford's (Humphrey Smith)

(Courtesy of the National Archives)



1835 Great Bardfield

The maps covering the whole of Essex, surveyed and drawn by Chapman and Andre, allow us to travel back 250 years.



1777 Plate VII

Black Lane is clearly depicted indicating that it must have been a significant feature in the landscape for them to have spent time surveying and drawing it.

(Courtesy of Essex Record Office)



1777 Index



1755 Estate Map

Our final stop, for the moment, is 1755 and a local treasure - the map that hangs in the church for all to see.

It is an estate map that was surveyed and drawn by Timothy Skynner of Coggeshall for the local landowner, James Raymond.

This map again reinforces the idea that Black Lane was of some significance since it is depicted in the same detail as the other roads in the parish.

These older maps often give an indication of the origin of names so “Paul” would seem to be a modern spelling of the original “Poll”

As I walk this green lane in the months to come, my thoughts will turn to those who have travelled along it over the last 270 years. I will also marvel at the persistence and accuracy of the surveyors who made my research of this sleeping beauty possible.

Curiosity means that the journey back in time continues.



Nigel Hill December 2021