



## Local Wildlife Sites Project: Citation for Brome Hall Lane

<b>Site Name:</b> Brome Hall Lane	<b>Site Ref:</b> SP17V1	<b>Grid Ref:</b> SP183705 – 181693
<b>Local Authority Area:</b> Warwick DC		<b>Date Selected:</b> 17/09/21
<b>Ownership:</b> Public Green Lane	<b>Length:</b> 2.1 km	<b>Management:</b> C
<p><b>1. Summary of importance.</b> A good example of an Arden green lane, which contains a nice selection of ancient woodland indicator plants.</p>		
<p><b>2. Position in the landscape and access.</b> Brome Hall Lane is situated in a rural area on the eastern side of Lapworth parish, 500m south of the hamlet of Kingswood and 2.25km south-east of the parish church. The section of lane within the LWS extends from Brome Hall at the northern end to High Chimneys in Lapworth Street at the southern end, which is on the parish boundary with Bushwood. It also includes the western unsurfaced end of Dick's Lane, which extends for 200m from Brome Hall Lane east to Dick's Lane Bridge on the nearby Stratford Canal. From there the now surfaced road continues to Turner's End. The lane is bordered by small to medium sized hedged grass fields in the northern section, particularly in the brook valley to the east, but turning to larger arable fields towards the south. A few tiny spinneys add to the landscape, with larger woodlands visible to the south on the hills around Bushwood. The lane is crossed by the embanked M40 motorway 500m from the southern end, but otherwise the landscape is entirely rural, with the only buildings visible being the farmsteads at Brome Hall and High Chimneys. The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal runs parallel with the lane in the valley to the east and comes in places to within 200m of it but it is generally hidden by the contours. Other local features of interest are the small Kingswood Junction Reservoirs and the Harborough Banks archaeological site just north of Brome Hall. There are extensive designated corridors of LWS's 1km west at the River Alne and 500m to the east and south-east in the Turner's End Farm-High Chimneys groups of sites. Most of these LWSs contain mosaics of wet semi-improved grassland and wet woodland, with the nearest part (Turner's End Marsh) almost joining the present LWS at Dick's Lane, only separated by the Stratford Canal, itself an important wildlife corridor and pLWS. Tapster Lane LWS is a similar ancient Arden green lane situated 1.4km to the west, while other important LWSs in the local area include the Packwood Estate (1.6km north-west) and Bush Wood (500m south-west). There is full public pedestrian access to the lane, with the section north of the Dick's Lane junction being also a designated public bridleway. It is still popular with local walkers.</p>		
<p><b>3. Land Use History*.</b> Brome Hall Lane is a very ancient green lane which is part sunken in places. Although its history is unwritten it may date back even as far as the Iron Age when Harborough Banks, a hillfort of around 10.8 ha in area was constructed. The oldest part of the lane begins on the southern side of the hillfort at what may have been a gate and meanders south. During the Anglo-Saxon period the district was largely woodland (as it still was at the time of Domesday Book in 1087), with Lapworth perhaps arising as an isolated border settlement of the Kingdom of the Hwicce, which</p>		



covered most of Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and west Warwickshire. One of the main tribes was called the *Stoppingas* and it is thought probable that their main settlement was at nearby Wootton Wawen, seat of a later Anglo-Saxon Minster. Most of the earliest roads in the area radiate from north to south towards this centre, including Brome Hall Lane, and it is possible that the hillfort continued to be used as a place of safety or defence during times of local upheaval, hidden as it probably was within extensive woodland. The name 'Harborough' comes from later Anglo-Saxon *Eorþburh*, or 'earthworks' so called presumably as it was by then disused and lacked any protective palisade fencing. The Hwicce became a client kingdom to neighbouring Mercia in 628 and by 700 had been entirely subsumed within that kingdom. By the early Norman period the lane still presumably ran through extensive woodland, connecting the King's Wood in the north with the Bishop's Wood (now corrupted to Bushwood) to the south, the latter land belonging to the Bishops of Worcester. However, this woodland was gradually broken up by the Norman lords with land given away to faithful retainers to clear and cultivate. The first mention of the land now occupied by Brome Hall was probably in 1296 when it is recorded that a carucate of land (usually around 120 acres but very variable in size) was held by Robert de Brome from the Duke of Lancaster, whose lands Lapworth was then part of. By 1343 this land included 'the waste of Erbury', later known as 'Little Herbury', now Harborough Banks, which was described as having been under woodland in 1408. Up until this time woodland is likely to have been still widespread west of the lane and it is possible that the lane formed the natural eastern boundary, if not wood bank, to this area. In 1495 the land was known as the Manor of *Bromes* or *Bromen*, and it was probably during this century when most of the remaining woodland was cleared for grazing or cultivation. By 1501 only a few small groves appeared to survive, one of which towards the parish boundary was called *Bromen Grove*, covering 8 acres (3.2ha), perhaps bordering the west side of the lane somewhere near the present motorway, which explains the presence of ancient woodland indicator plants in this area. Another small grove survived further south at the junction of Lapworth Street and the lane (on the west side), giving its name to the later field. The hillfort also lost its woodland in this century and was known as 'Herbury Heath'. All surviving groves appear to have disappeared from the landscape well before 1800.

In 1501 the manor was sold to George Catesby of Bushwood, already Lord of the Manor of Lapworth and became known as Bromesland, later Bromeham or Bromeshall. It was during this time that the old medieval house was replaced by a modern manor house, parts of which remain although partly rebuilt in succeeding centuries. Part of the former moat to the medieval house still exists north-east of the hall. All through this period the lane would have been the main access road to the hall, but it is unlikely that it was ever a major through route and this is borne out by the lack of any heavy erosion along the lane. The manor was sold by the Catesbys in around 1600 and the land then went through a succession of owners. The hall was set within landscaped grounds which extended west of the lane and contained several fishponds. There was still a Lord of the Manor of Brome Hall in 1822 but later the manor lost its status, and the hall was downgraded to a farmhouse. The greatest change to the landscape came in 1812, when to get as close to the Warwick and Birmingham Canal (now the Grand Union) as possible, the new Stratford-upon-Avon Canal was cut through Harborough Banks, with a lock and the two reservoirs destroying much of its history. The canal opened in 1816 and included a wharf on Dick's Lane by the bridge, which has now silted up and become colonised with marginal plants. The last vestiges of heathland were probably destroyed by enclosure within the hillfort in 1808 and later by gravel digging, although some rough grassland is still marked on the 1887 Six Inch OS map. The lane was still open to wheeled traffic until before the First World War, but the narrowness and sunken nature of the lane counted against motor traffic and it was left untarred. Most of it is now only passable to pedestrians and sections of the lane south of Dick's Lane has become narrowed due to the



encroachment of secondary woodland and scrubland from the boundary hedges. In post-war years there has been a gradual change from the traditional dairy farming (as practiced at Brome Hall) over to arable in adjoining fields which has partly changed the local landscape. An even greater change was the construction of the M40 motorway in the late 1980's (opening in December 1989) over the lane.

Over the last year there has been some rather severe ditching operations along the western boundary of the lane in the vicinity of the motorway underpass, with excavated soil dumped along the verges, burying the flora.

\*History taken from the VCH, *Woods, Wolds and Groves* by S J Wager and from *Our Warwickshire* and local archaeological sources.

#### 4. Topography and Geology.

The lane runs north to south along the gently sloping and east-facing valley side of the north flowing Kingswood Brook. This joins with the Cuttle Brook 5km away near Temple Balsall, before entering the River Blythe nearby. Side streams drain off the valley side in places, including one within the LWS 400m south of Brome Hall. The lane, which is naturally damp, follows the valley side between the 100 and 105m contours. Underlying geology comprises the Mercia Mudstone series of Triassic clays of the Arden Sandstone subsection. This includes bands of sandstone and patches of sand and gravel, as present on the nearby Harborough Banks hillfort.

#### 5. Habitat Description.

The site consists of a narrow green lane bordered on both sides by a bank and ditch, with the former carrying a generally species diverse hedge, although this is no longer managed along much of its length away from the vicinity of Brome Hall and the motorway. The lane is naturally damp and includes small flushes and a silted pond along its course. The hedges are probably many centuries old and are dominated by either Hawthorn or Blackthorn, or a mix of both. The latter is generally dominant in areas of impeded drainage in the central and southern stretches of lane and where the verge was formerly wide on the western side, it has spread out and formed scrub woodland. Other shrubs present include frequent Field Maple, Hazel and both Field and Dog Rose, with occasional Holly, Goat Sallow, Crack Willow and Elder. Wild Privet, Apple and probably Midland Hawthorn are rare. Common Gorse is occasional along the southern bank of Dick's Lane, where the soil appears sandier in nature. Mature Pedunculate Oaks are frequent along both sides of the lane south of the Dick's Lane Junction but are confined to the west side further north. A few are also present along Dick's Lane itself which tends to be of a more open and scrubby character. Mature Ash trees are occasional throughout the more wooded sections, while a few mature Alder and Crack Willow occur where the stream crosses the lane and at a nearby silted pond, as well as by the canal at Dick's Lane. Of more interest is a group of several mature Small-leaved Limes in the hedges on either side of the lane just to the north of the motorway underpass.

The hedge banks and verges support a well-established and diverse woodland flora, probably deriving directly from the 16<sup>th</sup> century groves which once bordered the lane. This is strongly suggested by the presence of eight species which are indicators of ancient woodland in Warwickshire. The most widespread species present are frequent to abundant Moschatel (particularly in the wetter areas), Garlic Mustard, Cow Parsley, Ivy, Creeping Soft-grass, Bluebell, Dog's Mercury, Bracken (from Dick's Lane southwards), Lesser Celandine, Greater Stitchwort and Bush Vetch, with also at least locally frequent Wood Anemone, Cuckoo Pint, False Brome,



Hairy Brome, Pendulous Sedge, Pignut, Herb Robert, Herb Bennet, Ground-ivy, Nipplewort, Honeysuckle, Wood Melick, Wood Meadow-grass, Bramble, Red Campion, Hedge Woundwort, Wood Speedwell and Common Dog-violet. Species which are occasional to very locally frequent include Wild Angelica, Lesser Burdock, Remote Sedge, Tufted Hair-grass, Common Male-fern, Broad-leaved Willowherb, Giant Fescue, Cleavers, Hard Shield-fern, Barren Strawberry, Primrose, Goldilocks Buttercup, Redcurrant, Wood Dock, Sanicle (Dick's Lane), Common Figwort, Black Bryony, Wood Sage (Dick's Lane), Ivy-leaved and Thyme-leaved Speedwells, Tufted Vetch and Early Dog-violet. Species of rare frequency include Foxglove, Common Hemp-nettle, Soft Rush, Pellitory-of-the-wall, Lungwort (Dick's Lane) and Sweet Violet. In the wet flushes along the trackway and around the pond, in addition to some of the previously named plants, are stands of locally frequent Great Willowherb and Meadowsweet, together with locally abundant Common Water-starwort, Floating Sweet-grass, Common Water-pepper and locally frequent Wavy Bittercress, Creeping Jenny, Silverweed, Creeping Buttercup and Brooklime.

On the grassier verges which still exist, particularly where the lane meets Lapworth Street, there are still a few patches of forbs and grasses characteristic of old meadowland, including Crested Dogstail, Common Knapweed, Red Bartsia and Creeping Cinquefoil. At the latter site there are also patches of Cowslip and Primrose, with their natural hybrid False Oxlip growing on an old spoil bank. It is of interest that False Oxlip was also recorded from hedge banks in this tetrad during the 1971 county botanical atlas which used records from the 1950's and 60's, and from the lane banks here as far back as 1905 (see Edith Holden's *Nature Notes of an Edwardian Lady* (pub. 1989)).

### 6. Other Faunal, Floral and Fungal groups.

The lane held a good variety of birds on both visits, characteristic of both woodland and farmland. Among these were Pheasant, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Stock Dove, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Mistle and Song Thrushes, Raven, Dunnock, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer. Seven species recorded are nationally red-listed<sup>5</sup>, but how many of these birds breed within the LWS is not known. Otherwise, data for the site is deficient. A few common butterflies were noted, including Speckled Wood, during the survey as well as Southern Hawker dragonfly.

### 7. Phase 1 Habitats present (with Phase 1 codes in brackets)\*

Dense scrub (A21), Native species rich hedge with trees (J231) and minor areas of Semi-improved neutral grassland (B22), with Standing water (G1) and Running water (G2).

\*Please refer to Appendix I Habitat Map



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### 8. Evaluation against the criteria<sup>3</sup>

Habitat criteria applied: Hedgerows.

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site						COMMUNITY CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site				
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5
Diversity	√	√	√	√			Physical & Visual Access	√		√	√	
Rarity	√	√					Educational Value					
Size	√						Community & Amenity Value	√	√	√		
Naturalness	√	√		√			Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape	√	√	√		
Fragility		√					Geographical Position		√			
Typicalness	√						Recorded History					
Ecological Position	√	√	√				Continuity of Land Use	√		√	√	
Significant Populations												
Potential Value												

### 9. Why this site qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site: summary of assessment

Brome Hall Lane qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site with 15 scientific and 13 community criteria applying, of which the following are considered the most important.

#### Diversity

The hedges along the course of the lane have on average around seven shrub species per 30m stretch, although totals vary and in places are rather less. On this basis it is considered that at least sections of these hedges are of medieval origin, with some probably representing former wood banks or boundaries. The hedges are very species diverse, with 142 vascular plants found on the survey including many which are characteristic of established woodland, including Moschatel, Wood Anemone, Bluebell, Wood Melick, Dog's Mercury, Bracken, Wood Meadow-grass, Greater Stitchwort, Bush Vetch and three species of violet. Eight of these (Moschatel, Wood Anemone, Remote Sedge, old Hazel coppice, Wood Melick, Wood Meadow-grass, Small-leaved Lime and Wood Speedwell) are indicators of ancient woodland in the county. The lane also holds an above average number of woodland and farmland birds and with further study, probably for other groups as well.

#### Rarity

Ancient hedgerow is an important and threatened habitat both in Warwickshire and nationwide, with all surviving examples needing protection wherever possible. It supports several county notable<sup>7</sup> or uncommon<sup>1</sup> plants, including Moschatel, Wood Melick, Wood Meadow-grass, Sanicle, Small-leaved Lime, Wood Speedwell and Early Dog-violet, all of which are associated with ancient or well-established woodland in Warwickshire.



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### Naturalness

The hedgerows are mostly thought to be of ancient origin, with sections probably of late medieval origin. Sections of the lane are unmanaged with verges having developed naturally into secondary woodland but colonised by woodland plants from the adjoining hedge banks.

### Typicalness

This is one of the best examples of an ancient Arden Green Lane with associated hedgerows in Warwickshire.

### Ecological Position

There is still moderately good connectivity via existing hedgerows to the wider landscape, including to scrub woodland on the Harborough Banks pLWS to the north and to several deciduous woodlands to the south, including Bush Wood LWS. The lane is directly connected to the Grand Union Canal pLWS, an important wildlife corridor. The lane itself is a locally important corridor for woodland birds and presumably other groups.

### Physical and Visual Access

The lane and its detached section of Dick's Lane are county roads and both fully open to pedestrians, with the northern half also to horses.

### Community and Amenity Value

It is well-used by local people and ramblers for recreation, providing a quiet woodland walk with many opportunities to see local wildlife and displays of colourful flowers such as Bluebell.

### Aesthetic Appeal and Landscape Character

This narrow wooded green lane is a survival from the ancient Arden countryside and preserves a historical link to the past.

### Continuity of Land Use

The lane is an ancient feature of the local countryside and is historically linked to the medieval manor of Brome Hall, now just a farmhouse. It preserves an ancient bank and ditch system in places which were probably once wood banks.

<b>Sources of information:</b>		Ecosite No: 105/17 (part)	
<b>Survey Details:</b>			
Date:	Survey Type:	Surveyors:	Location of records
16/04/2021	Phase 2	J J Bowley, C Newton	HBA
04/09/2020	Phase 2	J J Bowley, C Newton	HBA
09/05/2013	Phase 1	C F Talbot	HBA



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Any Other Information:

### Management

<u>Category</u>	<u>Current management</u>	<u>Management recommendation</u>
A	Good	Maintain current regime
B	Medium	Enhance current regime
<b>C</b>	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Enhance as necessary</b>
D	Inappropriate	Change management regime

### Recommendations:

Keep damaging ditching work to a minimum and remove excavated soil from site, rather than dumping it on the verges.

There is no need for any regular conservation management work to take place.

Completed by: J J Bowley

Date: 24/05/2021

Passed by Sites Selection Panel: Yes

Signed by the Chair:

Date: 17/09/2021

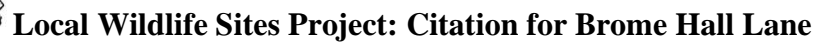
On behalf of the LWS panel.



## References

1. Falk S. J. (2009). *Warwickshire's Wildflowers*. Studley.
2. JNCC. (1993 repr.). *Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: a technique for environmental audit*. Peterborough: JNCC.
3. Local Wildlife Sites Project. (2015). *The Green Book: Guidance for the selection of Local Wildlife Sites in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull*. Warwick: Habitat Biodiversity Audit office.
4. Rodwell J. S. et al (2003 repr.) *British Plant Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. RSPB/BTO. (2015). *BoCC4: Birds of Conservation Concern*. RSPB/BTO.
6. Stroh et al. (2014). *Red Data List of Vascular Plants in England*. Peterborough: JNCC.
7. Walton J. and M. (2018). *Rare Plant Register for Warwickshire*.





Warwick District Council