Gloucestershire's Stone Stiles: An Update

This is an update on last September's post about a *project* to record all the stone stiles in Gloucestershire. Peter Wilson reports a "fantastic" response. More about that below and keep reading to find out about a special role for Stinchcombe.

Surprises

Three things have surprised Peter:

- the enthusiastic support (over 120 contributors)
- the extraordinary number of stone stiles already reported (over 400)
- the discovery of many stiles tossed aside or where there is no longer a path

Types of Stile Reported

So far there are few step stiles, more squeeze stiles than anticipated, but an abundance of slab stiles. This ties in with findings in Stinchcombe where we've found one squeeze stile, five slab stiles and no step stiles at all. Peter reasons that slab stiles were the best at preventing those Cotswold sheep from roaming. They are also a tricky or even impossible obstacle for some walkers! As a result, alternative access through boundary walls and hedges exists in many places. It would be a great shame if that led to these historical landscape features being abandoned.



An example of a step stile (not in Stinchcombe)



A step stile on Park Lane, Stancombe Park, Stinchcombe



A disused slab stile in Stinchcombe parish, near Snitend Bridge

Getting Recognition for Stone Stiles

Like it or loathe it, Brexit is changing farming support. In future, public money will support farmers who deliver public benefits. This is the perfect time to emphasise the historic landscape value of stiles. Stone stiles, along with stone walls, also provide an important wildlife habitat. Furthermore, learning about them can stimulate an interest in the countryside.

But … this integral part of the landscape is unprotected and barely mentioned in the ***Countryside Stewardship Scheme***. Peter has secured the support of ***Siobhan Baillie MP***, who is taking up the matter with ***Defra***. Others involved in the project are contacting their own MPs. The aim is to get stone stiles recognised in Defra's planning processes and ideally within the stewardship schemes.

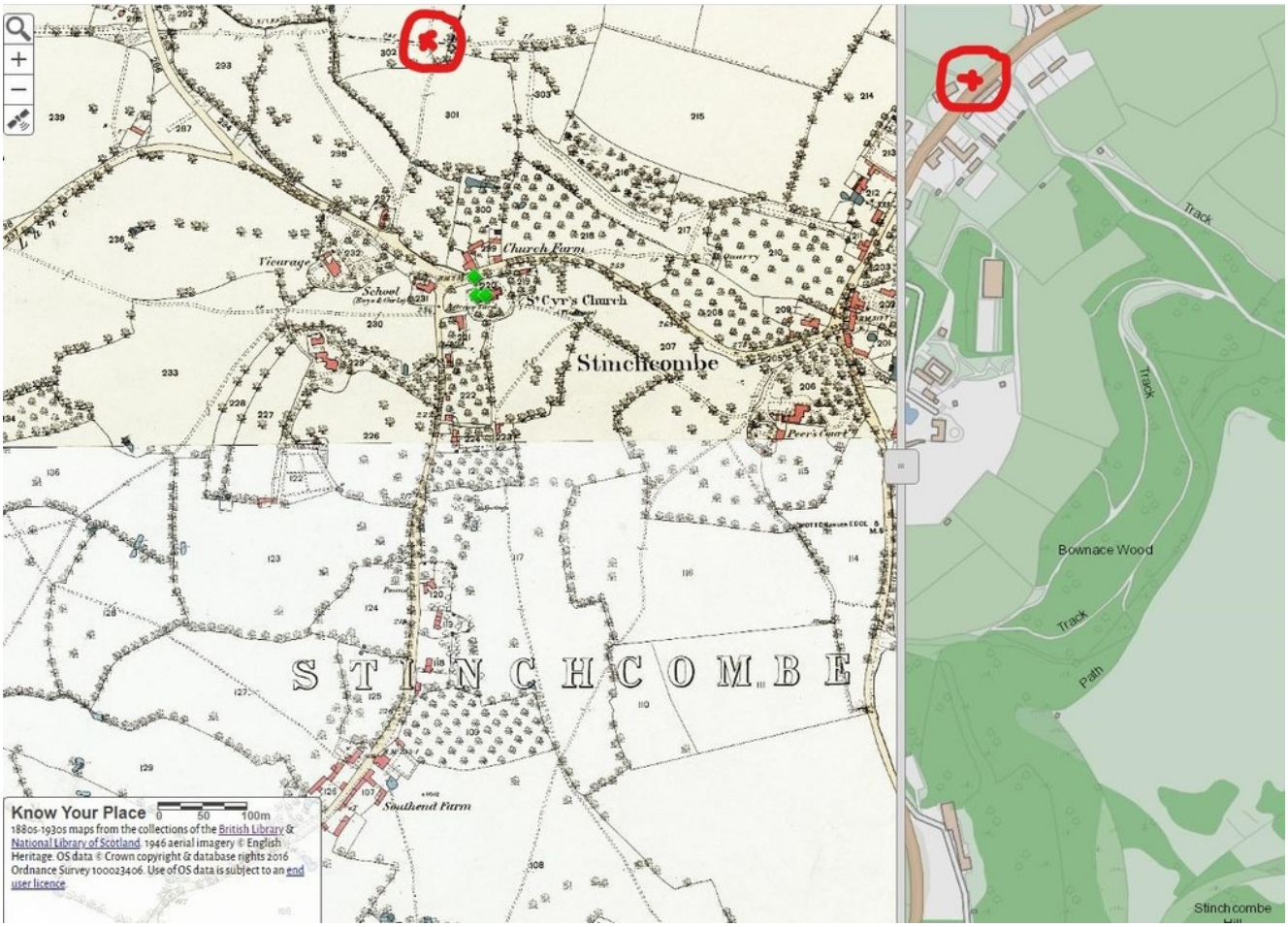
Stinchcombe's Stone Stiles

There could be more to find – are you still looking?

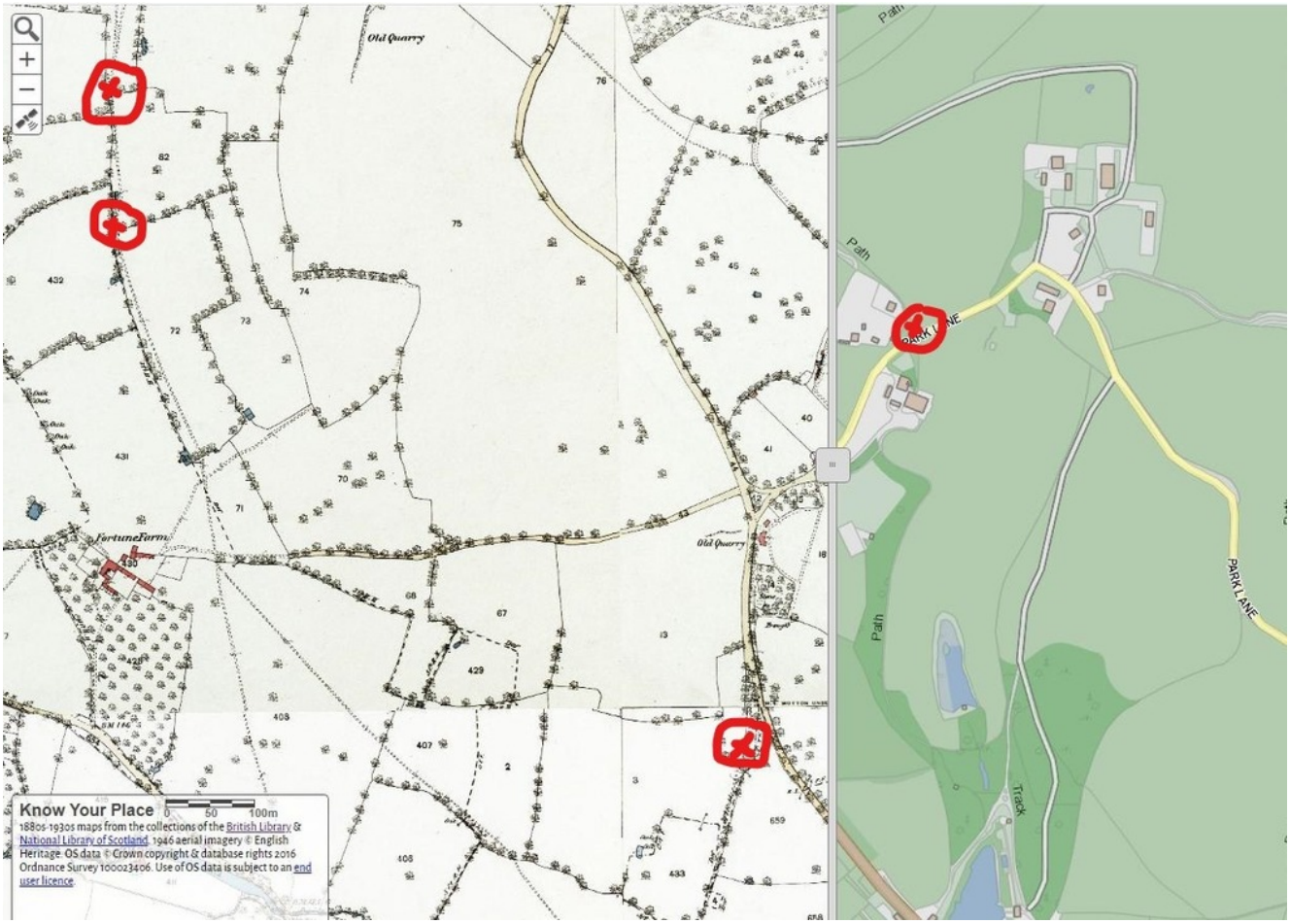
Peter is especially keen that people keep an eye out for disused stone stiles. They may highlight lost rights of way that it is not too late to restore. Two Gloucestershire rambling clubs are now publicising the project.

Remember, disused stone stiles are usually near the modern path rather than actually on it. No need to stray from the path though – all those found have been visible from a public right of way.

The two maps show the locations of the six stiles already identified in our parish. I am most grateful to ***Gloucestershire Archives*** and ***Know Your Place*** for permission to use screenshots from the Know Your Place digitial mapping project. If you haven't explored the maps at ***Know Your Place Gloucestershire*** you have a treat in store.



Know Your Place screenshot of north Stinchcombe – stone stiles marked with red crosses
(with the kind permission of Gloucestershire Archives and Know Your Place)



Know Your Place screenshot of south Stinchcombe – stone stiles marked with red crosses
(With the kind permission of Gloucestershire Archives and Know Your Place)

A Special Role for Stinchcombe

Stinchcombe History Society has been asked to pilot the next phase of the project – collection of information for the proposed interactive App. The App will combine OS map recording with a detailed record for each stile. The plan is for the pilot to take place in only one parish in the whole of Gloucestershire. We are honoured and very excited to be chosen.

What is more, as you can see from the brief below, the pilot has the potential to be a real community effort. If you're a keen photographer, walker, map reader, local historian, archaeologist or geologist **WE WANT YOU**!

The Brief for the Pilot

1. Add up to four photographs of each stile and its landscape in an agreed format.
2. Identify the type of stone in any adjacent stone wall, possible source, any signs of re-use, and age since quarried/sited
3. Identify type of stile, type and source of stile stone used and any signs of reuse.
4. Relate the site to the nearest known ancient burial site(s) and considering whether this is the source of the stone.
5. Try to determine the date of the stile and adjacent wall (often after a Land Enclosure Act).
6. Note and investigate any changes made to the stile.
7. Verify the OS co-ordinates.
8. Note the right of way, if applicable, on which the stile is located.
9. Describe the condition of stile and pathway and how it used or bypassed, including suitability for people with disabilities.
10. For disused stiles, seek out any knowledge of the former pathway.
11. Create in partnership with others succinct, informative notes in a format suitable for addition to the App, together with appropriate photographs.

Contact

If you would like to get involved with the pilot, please contact Kath.

Any further stone stiles you find in the parish can be reported to Peter using the form you can download ***here***. If you prefer, I can fill the form in, crediting you as the finder.

Kath Hudson



Clingre Lane a stone step stile standing in front of a wire fence with the roots of a tree to its right

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55 Years in Stinchcombe

Memories of our 55 years living in Stinchcombe

The 60’s

When we moved to Stinchcombe in the 1960’s the Village school was still open (it closed in 1966), the motorway was being built, the Stinchcombe Band and the WI were flourishing. The

Stinchcombe Stragglers Cricket Club was well known and attracted regular star appearances. Fundraising was mainly in aid of the Church. Events in the Village Hall under the eagle eye of Miss Chew Hooper were relatively low key.

The 70’s

During the 70’s the Church bells rang out again. Dursley Rugby Club relocated and combined with the Cricket Club to form the Stinchcombe Sports Club. Junior cricket and rugby teams catered for the youngsters of the surrounding area. We celebrated the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in style. New people moved into the village and started to join in.

The 80’s

This trend accelerated in the 1980’s as new faces appeared on the Parish Council the PCC and other groups. A Village Cook Book was produced and we had a Flower Festival in the Church and newcomers became involved in various schemes.

The 90’s



And so into the 90's. The Village Hall widened its scope and was gradually refurbished and improved. There were barbecues, fun sports , November 5th bonfires and fireworks, open gardens, barn dances, treasure trails , checking of footpaths and much more.

The Millennium and beyond

The 21st Century was ushered in with the lighting of a beacon on Stinchcombe Hill (albeit in the fog!) The work of the Village Hall Committee has given us a superb venue for more and bigger events : Summer Balls, craft fairs, concerts , plant sales, village shows, jubilee celebrations etc. The Friends of St Cyr's Church was formed in 2005 and has seen completion of several ambitious projects, with more to come.

The Village Plan published in 2008 and subsequently refreshed has led to several initiatives. We have seen Last Nights of The Proms, Open Gardens, concerts, exhibitions and a safari supper in the Church and have enjoyed the use of Church Farm Barn for barn dances, art exhibitions, garden parties, antiques road shows, wine-tastings and more. A History Society and book club have been formed and a village newsletter and e-news published. There is a set of Village Walks covering much of the parish. We have a theatre club and TGI Fridays. In 2011 the Village came together in a big way with the Save Berkeley Vale Campaign to fight the erection of 4 giant wind turbines at the edge of the conservation area.

The Future?

So now in 2020 how do we go on? Lockdown has highlighted the wonderful sense of belonging and caring that we all share. I have been very proud to be a part of the activities through the years but some of us are ageing (reluctantly) and are slowing down. New young heads are needed so that we can move forward. We do have something very special in this village and now we require new faces on our committees with fresh ideas to carry on the work which has evolved through the decades. .

The Witches of Malmesbury

STINCHCOMBE HISTORY SOCIETY

In 1672, the north Wiltshire town of Malmesbury was swept by witchcraft hysteria. Leading families were convinced that their children were under attack from an organised coven of witches. Fourteen people were arrested as members of the

coven.

Visiting speaker Tony McAleavy has researched this little-known episode using sources that survive from the time. He will tell the story of the witches of Malmesbury and what happened when some of the accused were sent for trial in Salisbury.

The Witches of Malmesbury by Tony McAleavy

7.30 pm Friday 21st February 2020 at Stinchcombe Village Hall