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**‘Landscape Archaeology, Heritage and the  
Community in Devon; an Oral History  
Approach’**

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# **‘Landscape Archaeology, Heritage and the Community in Devon; an Oral History Approach’**

## **Abstract**

In the context of recent media, governmental, academic and popular attention and enthusiasm for debates surrounding the construction and meaning of the British countryside, this paper outlines the potential for oral history to make a contribution. Working in Devon, the authors outline how an oral history methodology can engage with the fields of landscape archaeology and heritage studies. As well as augmenting and supporting more traditional approaches to landscape, oral history techniques can be used to challenge and destabilize existing knowledge, thereby moving the process of ‘democratisation’ in knowledge construction of the rural landscape from practices of scientific ‘complicity’, towards one of critical engagement.

**Keywords: Oral History; Landscape Studies; Construction of Knowledge; Nature Conservation, Traditional Practice**

## **Introduction**

Alongside a more general increase in the popularity of heritage issues over the last decade or so, public interest in all aspects of landscape heritage, and especially of landscape archaeology, has appeared to be both genuine and enduring in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Television in particular, has fastened on to this phenomenon, with several high profile series or individual programmes that have focussed on various aspects of landscape archaeological heritage in the British Isles.<sup>2</sup> A common strand, at least in the media interest in issues of landscape interpretation and heritage management, has been a continued reliance on the *expert* interpretation of material artefacts, and associated deference towards scientific research. Despite the genuine public appeal of landscape heritage therefore, popular representation and interpretation still appear to reside within the bounds of the singular linear narrative of the expert.<sup>3</sup>

This deference towards expert knowledge is, perhaps, a little surprising, when one considers how popular attitudes to the British landscape more generally are formed, with emphatically *unscientific* notions of the rural idyll as a culturally embedded and mediated construction, informing both contemporary and historical studies of the matter.<sup>4</sup> While some recourse to scientific and other ‘expert’ knowledge is sometimes made, popular

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<sup>1</sup> Graham et al., *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*, Harvey, 'Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies', Howard, *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity*. Symonds, 'Historical Archaeology and the Recent Urban Past.'

<sup>2</sup> Such programmes are perhaps led by Channel 4's *Timeteam*, but would also include *Meet the Ancestors*, *Time Flyers*, *the House Detectives*, *Two Men in a Trench* and, more recently, *Extreme Archaeology*, not to mention such related programmes as *War Walks*, *Restoration, 1940's House* and many more ‘living docu-history’ or heritage-related programmes.

<sup>3</sup> A good example is the BBC's recent *British Isles: A Natural History*, in which ‘secrets and mysteries hidden in the landscape are revealed’ by ‘natural history enthusiast’ Alan Titchmarsh. While packaged for a non-expert audience, the series was ‘co-produced’ with experts from the Open University, through which access may be gained to a website with section titles such as *Scientists: how do they know that?* (<http://www.open2.net/naturalhistory/>. Accessed 1/12/2004).

attitudes and understandings of the rural landscape expressed by such groups as the Countryside Alliance are formed very much through a faith in non-experts who have a supposedly ‘organic’ relationship with the landscape. In addition, recent events such as the BSE and Foot and Mouth crises, and debates over GMO crops, have uncovered a high level of popular hostility towards science and a suspicion of knowledge produced by experts.<sup>5</sup> Within the worlds of academic landscape research, heritage interpretation and popular media coverage, however – at least at an official level – the voice of the expert is still central, whether that expert is a landscape or art historian, environmental scientist or archaeologist.

This paper outlines how an oral history approach has engaged with aspects of landscape heritage, exploring the success of such an approach in terms of how the oral history data can augment, destabilize and even challenge existing scientific knowledge, as well as offering alternative narratives. The research drawn upon in this paper is taken from an AHRB funded project entitled *Landscape archaeology and the community in Devon: An oral history approach*, which considered the potential for oral history to provide an alternative stream of data relating to the landscape in Devon.<sup>6</sup> A total of 23 interviews, with 34 interviewees, were conducted with those farming and working the land in the period around the Second World War (see figure 1). The wartime focus was used in particular because the period has become regarded, retrospectively at least, as the birth of the modernisation of British agriculture and the start of the productivist regime, which has been seen to be so detrimental to the British Landscape.<sup>7</sup> While there have been a number of ‘official’ histories written about the ‘Home Front’ during the War, there has been less attention paid to those who actually farmed the land – who instigated agricultural changes, and who can recall the landscape prior to, during and after these changes.<sup>8</sup>

#### FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

In recent years, oral histories have begun to be taken more seriously by academics and heritage practitioners alike in their explorations of the past – particularly with respect to uncovering the lived experiences of a world that was produced and consumed in complex and multiple ways.<sup>9</sup> The present paper contends that oral history approaches have considerable potential for how we interpret and manage our landscape heritage, through

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Brace, 'Finding England Everywhere: Regional Identity and the Construction of National Identity 1890-1940.', Gilbert et al., *Geographies of British Modernity: Space and Society in the Twentieth Century*; Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, Woods, 'Deconstructing Rural Protest: The Emergence of a New Social Movement'.

<sup>5</sup> Donaldson et al., 'Virus-Crisis-Institutional Change: The Foot and Mouth Actor Network and the Governance of Rural Affairs in the UK', Eden, 'Environmental Issues: Knowledge, Uncertainty and the Environment.'

<sup>6</sup> AHRB 'Innovation Award', number AR15611. The authors would like to formally acknowledge the AHRB for funding this research.

<sup>7</sup> Short et al., *The National Farm Survey 1941-1943: State Surveillance and the Countryside in England and Wales in the Second World War*, Winter, *Rural Politics: Policies for Agriculture, Forestry, and the Environment*.

<sup>8</sup> Though see for example the reflection on the Women's Land Army: Tryer, *They Fought in the Fields - the Women's Land Army: The Story of a Forgotten Victory*.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Smith and Jackson, 'Narrating the Nation: The 'Imagined Community' of Ukrainians in Bradford', Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews'. A particularly pertinent example with respect to environmental concerns is Hussey and Thompson, *The Roots of Environmental Consciousness: Popular Tradition and Personal Experience*.

offering a more nuanced, dynamic and rich account of a British landscape that is seen as being far more than a collection of physical attributes and measurable artefacts.

Following a short contextual discussion of how Devon's 'ancient landscape' has hitherto been approached, the paper outlines how oral history may make a contribution. Outlining how oral histories may be used to construct a different account of Devon's agricultural landscape that reflects local and personalized understandings, complexity and scientific uncertainty, the discussion is then broadened to consider recent trends towards recognising social value and community inclusion in both archaeological and heritage practice.

## **Agricultural landscape heritage: the contribution of oral history**

### ***The 'ancient landscape' of Devon***

As a subject for applied landscape study, the county of Devon, with large areas of what is normally seen as a comparatively 'well-preserved landscape', is an interesting case. Indeed, as the home county and a central study area for W.G. Hoskins, Devon can be seen as something of a cradle for landscape studies in the UK.<sup>10</sup> The popular view is that Devon has large areas of 'permanent' pasture and rough grazing and has been relatively unscarred by heavy industry, meaning that archaeological features have endured, traceable by aerial photography, cartographic or field survey and excavation.<sup>11</sup> Although landscape archaeologists and historians have generally been less interested in studying landscape changes and developments that have occurred over the last century or so, they have generally been joined by a wide body of landscape enthusiasts and conservationists in their *concern* over these changes, such as the ploughing up of pasture or the impoverishment of hedgerow care. This concern for landscape preservation and heritage management has attracted implicit support from the important tourism sector in the county, as well as more explicit support from policy makers and pressure groups (such as the National Trust, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Government office of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), through well-funded national programmes such as the *Countryside Stewardship Scheme*, *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty* or the *Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme*.

One thing that all of these groups seem to have in common, however, is a decidedly artefact-centred view of the landscape as an aesthetic object. From a normative point of view, one may question the degree to which Devon's landscape has indeed remained relatively 'untouched': its pasture 'permanent', its agricultural practices 'ageless', its landscape heritage 'preserved'. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century for instance, Devon was among the foremost industrial regions of the country, especially in textiles, while mining and quarrying have also left many marks on the physical landscape.<sup>12</sup> Even in terms of changing agricultural practices, Devon was never the backwater of some popular opinion. Indeed in a review of landscape change in Devon and Cornwall in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries for instance, Turner challenges the enthusiasm of such landscape luminaries as Oliver Rackham and even W.G. Hoskins himself in their support of the idea of Devon

<sup>10</sup> Hoskins, *Devon*, Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*.

<sup>11</sup> Haviden and Stanes, 'Agriculture and Rural Settlement, 1500-1800'. p.285, for instance, in noting that the landscape of both Devon and Cornwall was essentially the same today as it was in the early modern era imply their confidence in the notion of a 'preserved' and unchanging countryside.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Kain and Ravenhill, *Historical Atlas of South West England*.

having an essentially unchanging and untouched ‘ancient landscape’.<sup>13</sup> Even if we agree that Devon possesses a *relatively* ‘well preserved’ physical landscape, its countryside has remained anything but static in terms of how landscape meanings are constructed and rehearsed. Devon’s landscape can only ever be understood as being the product of the (post-industrial) early twenty-first century, influenced by all aspects of our postmodern society, formed by the dominance of the car, the potency of information technology, the ‘gaze’ of the camera and the concern for ‘lifestyle’, of which anxiety over landscape heritage is a particular attribute. While many interesting questions about the form of the physical ‘palimpsestual’ landscape can indeed be answered using positivist approaches, therefore, this paper seeks to uncover a line of evidence that may at once both animate existing scientific narratives and also challenge them.

### ***Excavating oral histories of Devon’s landscape:***

While oral histories have been an increasingly popular lens through which to consider the past, and the Second World War in particular, they remain a highly problematic strand of data.<sup>14</sup> They are not ‘heroic histories’, telling it ‘like it was’, and we must always be careful in our use of them. They are partial, subjective, reflexive, ambiguous, sometimes contradictory and often tensioned.<sup>15</sup> In these respects, therefore, they are just like all historical narratives. They can give voice to people and views that are not often heard, but, as in this paper, they are voices that are often mediated and *used* by academics and others for particular purposes. This greater sense of reflexivity within oral history approaches has been reflected by a wider recognition, in recent years, of its potential to reach beyond the notion that there is a single ‘truthful’ historical narrative that needs to be uncovered.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as Nevin suggests, oral histories allow us some degree of entry into “the structure and variety of a society or culture, as manifested by an individual’s world view, cultural traits and traditions”.<sup>17</sup> In other words, they help us co-construct the landscape through people’s contextualised recollection of that particular place – what Patricia Partnow has described as ‘linguistically appropriating the landscape’.<sup>18</sup>

The first example is taken from an interview where a farmer (aged 90 years) was questioned about historical features on his land:

[Interviewer]:  
*Are there any historical features on your land?*

[Farmer]

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<sup>13</sup> Hoskins, *Devon*, Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*, Turner, 'The Changing Ancient Landscape: South-West England c.1700-1900', p. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> Exemplified in projects such as the BBC’s *WW2 – People’s War* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/>).

<sup>15</sup> Bender, 'The Branscombe Project: Where History Meets Memory', Symposium Paper Presented at *Talking Landscapes: On Geography and the Practice of Oral History*, University of Exeter, 8th July 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Smith and Jackson, 'Narrating the Nation: The 'Imagined Community' of Ukrainians in Bradford', Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*.

<sup>17</sup> Nevins, 'Oral History: How and Why It Was Born', p.9.

<sup>18</sup> Referred to in Green, 'Coffee and Bun, Sergeant Bonnington and the Tornado: Myth and Place in Frankton Junction.'

*They tell me we've got burial mounds. They've been to look at it ...and it's been mapped out. We used to use it to load the cows for market. It's sloped up you see, so we used to back the lorry up to it and run the cows into the lorry.*

The mound in question had been 'discovered' by archaeologists in the 1990s, the site was rigorously measured, carefully surveyed and recorded as a 'burial mound', probably of Bronze Age origin. For the normative, positivist and artefact-centred record, a new dot could be placed on a map, a set of measurements and ground survey recorded on the Sites and Monuments Register, and a heritage management plan be established for the site's preservation for posterity. However, to claim that the site had not been previously known about is only correct within the narrowly scientific confines of academic and statutory archaeological and landscape record. Although any unrecorded stories, legends and uses of the site previous to the mid-twentieth century are out of reach, at least one person had known about the mound all his life: the farmer on whose land it is situated. While previous work on the 'Bronze Age burial mounds' in this part of the country has focused on their relationship with early boundaries for instance, the use of these 'burial mounds' for such purposes as cattle ramps has remained mysteriously off the official heritage or archaeological record.<sup>19</sup>

At first sight, this particular case of a single Bronze Age burial mound/cattle ramp in Devon appears to be both marginal to landscape study, and positively 'destructive' in terms of heritage management – the use of burial mounds for loading cows onto a truck is not recommended in any heritage manual that the authors are aware of. Jones however notes the importance of recognizing the value of narratives that are not necessarily 'correct', showing how such narratives can reveal a great deal about an individual's relationship with a historical site as well as how knowledge about a site or landscape more generally is *used* by interested individuals and groups.<sup>20</sup> In this case, the farmer's interpretation of the burial mound/cattle ramp was not 'correct', but his interpretation was full of *meaning*, which was not restricted to the obvious agenda of archaeological science. At a level of interpreting the physical landscape, the employment of the 'burial mound' as a cattle ramp has undoubtedly affected the feature's form and so must be recognized. Ironically, the mound's value as a cattle ramp may well have inadvertently secured its physical integrity, since, as an unrecorded site, it may well have been 'legitimately' mechanically flattened or ploughed out, had the farmer not seen such a use for it. This reminds us of the importance to grapple with the metaphorical, symbolic, ironic and other connotative meanings, which are a dynamic and often contradictory part of everyday life.<sup>21</sup> For the farmer, the value of the mound was as an aid in loading cows onto a lorry, not in its historical, aesthetic or 'heritage' value. In order to account for the site's 'preservation' therefore, we should acknowledge the economic value of such mounds for the purposes of cattle management, and as a landscape feature, therefore, we should recognize the full 'life history' of the burial mound/cattle ramp.<sup>22</sup> Landscape archaeologists can be fairly certain that the original purpose of this archaeologically significant site/cattle ramp was connected to burial

<sup>19</sup> For instance, see the work of landscape historians such as Taylor, Bonney and Hooke. Taylor, *Dorset*; Bonney, 'Early Boundaries and Estates in Southern England', Hooke, *Pre-Conquest Charter-Bounds of Devon and Cornwall*. The example related in the oral history was still 'undiscovered' when these scientific surveys were being undertaken.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Early Medieval Sculpture and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place: The Case of Hilton of Cadboll* 27.

<sup>21</sup> Fernandez and Herzfeld, 'In Search of Meaningful Methods.' 90.

practices, although its original deeper meaning is still a matter of speculation and theory. As with all landscapes however, a biographical approach reveals several successive and even competing interpretations, indicating that any present day heritage management practices should recognise not one mound, about which only one (scientifically authenticated) story can be told, but several mounds, representing several narratives – some scientifically ‘correct’ and others personal, ironic or symbolic.

Increasingly, recent work by landscape archaeologists acknowledges the re-use and symbolic redeployment of such early sites within the context of later societies. With respect to prehistoric burial mounds for instance, as well as Holtorf’s numerous examples of how such sites were re-interpreted, Semple has recently explored the place of such mounds in Anglo-Saxon society, while Williams has examined how Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices referred to previous sites in a number of ways.<sup>23</sup> With this in mind, the Bronze-Age burial mound/cattle ramp example follows these studies its recognition that a feature such as a mound – whatever its origin, does not have a fixed meaning, and cannot be explained by a single narrative – whether led by an ‘expert’ or otherwise.

The burial mound example leads us to consider a number of more general issues that are of relevance to the heritage practitioner. In making space for a farmer’s personal narrative, questions over the very nature of what such terms as ‘landscape’ and ‘heritage’ represent are opened up. It calls for us to interrogate how knowledge about the countryside is normally constructed; it calls for us to examine how such knowledge is normally categorized; and it calls for us to explore how different categories of knowledge are regularly valued – by experts, policy makers and the wider public.

## FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE

Hedgerows for instance, are widely considered to be valuable for their aesthetic appeal, closely allied to many people’s image of the picture-perfect ‘English countryside’ (see figure 2). ‘Ancient’ is a term that is commonly applied to the patchwork of fields, suggesting an aura of ‘agelessness’, as field boundaries that originate in an undifferentiated ‘deep past’.<sup>24</sup> Having endured for so long, in a supposedly homogenous stasis, hedgerows are now seen as being ‘under threat’, requiring us to protect remaining examples, and re-instate examples that once ‘thrived’, in order to (re-)create the museum-in-aspic of an imagined English countryside. Policy makers, conservationists and picture postcard manufacturers are unified, as a great deal of effort and money is currently being channelled in to the active, and even ‘creative’, preservation of these landscape features.<sup>25</sup> The landscapes that are produced, however, hark not to the reality of hedgerow history, but to a

<sup>22</sup> See Holtorf, *Monumental Past: The Life-Histories of Megalithic Monuments in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Germany)*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, Semple, 'A Fear of the Past: The Place of the Prehistoric Burial Mound in the Ideology of Middle and Later Anglo-Saxon England', Williams, 'Lest We Remember', Williams, 'Monuments and the Past in Early Anglo-Saxon England.'

<sup>24</sup> Rackham for example suggests that many hedgerows may predate Anglo-Saxon times Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*. See Harvey for discussion of heritage and the ‘deep past’: Harvey, 'Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies.'

<sup>25</sup> Similar work utilising an oral history approach highlights parallels between this and the current efforts to conserve hay meadows through maintaining ‘traditional’ hay meadow management: Riley, 'Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay: Farm Practices, Oral History and Nature Conservation', Riley, *Changing Farm Practices and Nature Conservation: Hay and Silage Production in the Peak District since 1940*.

much more present-centred heritage agenda. The present concern for aesthetics and biodiversity for instance, while in many respects laudable, only reflects a partial hedgerow narrative. Oral history can offer a deeper understanding of the hedgerow story:

*Oh yes, at the end of the [Second World] war, father had a blitz and we went round and cut them all, but a lot of the hedges were like trees, all the way around ...some of those trees had enough rings to be more than 70 years old [...] When I was a child, I can't hardly remember any hedges that were topped ...we just hadn't got the labour to do it.*

Farmer, aged 74.

*Father and grandfather said that hedging didn't pay, so they just left them, so when I took over they had 70 or 80 years growth on. [...] They are definitely in better order than they have been for a hundred years, more than a hundred and fifty I expect.*

Farmer, aged 79.

These comments by local farmers directly challenge the idyllic narrative of hedgerow maintenance being part of a pre-mechanized countryside 'tradition', bringing into sharp focus the problems of labour supply and the cold realities of pre-War agriculture being under economic and social stress. Consequently, these comments raise the question of what hedging 'traditions' actually represent, forcing us to consider the meaning that is conveyed by present-day conservation practices. Similar to the issue of 'tradition' addressed more generally by Hobsbawm, present-day conservation practices such as hedge laying for instance, must be recognized as invented traditions that must be understood within the context of present-day agendas, wants and hopes for the future.<sup>26</sup> The idea of having hedges in the landscape is not 'brand new', but hedges are more than just one-dimensional physical objects. Hedges have a history, and their dynamic record of management, destruction and upkeep reflects changing attitudes and meanings associated with them. The practice of hedge laying for the purposes of constructing an eco-conservation-minded aesthetic object is both fairly new, and also reflective of present day heritage concerns. The oral history examples above imply that present day heritage practices are in pursuit of a 'traditional landscape' of rural prosperity and harmony: a landscape that papers over economic and social stress and is, rather, centred on the aesthetic gaze. While there are many excellent present-centred reasons for such hedgerow management, including floral and faunal conservation and soil erosion prevention, the lack of deeper social context in hedge management is further supported by the oral histories of respondents:

*The hedges would be trimmed and faggots would be used for kindling. Then the trimmings would be gathered up and thrown under the ricks. It all tied in you see? You cleared the field and then trimmed the hedges to lay under the ricks as you built them. It kept the rick up off the floor you see? Stopped it from getting damp.*

Farmer, aged 81.

In this case, rather than laying hedges for the sake of any romantic views of 'tradition' or the maintenance of bucolic views, the hedge laying process is placed within the context of

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<sup>26</sup> Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions'.



wider farming practices.<sup>27</sup> For this farmer, making good hay *demanded* a certain system of hedgerow management. As well as highlighting that the history of hedgerow management is one of multiple narratives, with hedges meaning different things to different people, and having different purposes in different areas, even down to the single farm level, this oral history emphasizes the role of hedges as an essential part of a particular system of farming. With wider agricultural trends moving towards silage production rather than haymaking, one of the fundamental meanings of hedge laying changes. The intention here is not to comment upon the ethics or indeed, the efficacy, of either hedgerow destruction or their management under conservation schemes. Rather it is seeking to make space for alternative narratives of hedgerow management – narratives that can both challenge some of the thinking behind such practices, as well as inform the construction of a more holistic heritage management policy for Britain’s landscape.

This need to recognize the wider context and meaning of such landscape features as hedges is best illustrated in the following oral history example:

*They'd got their certain field which they knew would grow good wheat, good barley, good oats, ...and it was all done on a seven year system.*

*If you said you were going to plough a certain field on your farm, starting, say, from October, whatever wood that was on the hedges would be cut and used for firing. The hedge would be reinstated as a Devon hedge because there would be turf in the field wouldn't there? And you would be allowed to use any turf out of that field because it was going to be ploughed see? And you reinstated your banks.*

*Then the field would be ploughed before Boxing Day that autumn, and in January, if they wanted spring wheat, he was tilled in January. If not, he was tilled late February, early March for oats and barley and then the following year he would go into winter wheat, which would be tilled in November:*

*[...] The winter wheat would come off in early July, but then he would be re-ploughed and put to what we call "sheep's meat", which is kale, swedes, turnips. Then you'd have two years of barley – that's five years. The sixth year would be oats, and the last year again would be barley with grass seeds under sown on it. In that seven years your hedge would have chance to re-grow from where it was laid and that. He would be nice and thick wouldn't he? And you'd get a nice stock proof hedge out of that. ... You also had a crop for firing.*

*So the hedge would be managed with the field in the rotation. ... On a farm of, say, 150 acres, there would be two or three fields done each year. ... It was kept as manageable – an ordinary man could do the job all yourself.  
Farmer, aged 78.*

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<sup>27</sup> This is comparable to the findings of a contemporary study of ditch management on the Pevensy levels in Sussex, UK: Burgess et al., 'Knowledges in Action: An Actor Network Analysis of a Wetland Agri-Environment Scheme,' 21.

This outline of a seven-year rotation system demonstrates how ‘involved’ and multi-dimensional the landscape is, and in trying to ‘preserve’ the physical face of the countryside, we are completely altering the very meaning of its features. The above example highlights how hedgerow management fitted in to a wider system of agricultural approach that is now redundant, and in doing so makes somewhat of a mockery of the practice, very common today, of laying a ‘traditional’ hedge and then protecting it with a barbed wire fence (see figure 3). The removal of hedgerows is often seen as a simple product of mechanization and the post-War profit-driven trend towards a system of agriculture that is akin to an American prairie.<sup>28</sup> Modern tractors and combine harvesters need more room to manoeuvre, while barbed wire fences take up less precious space than a hedgerow. Oral histories, however, reveal some of the diversity and balance of factors that are at work within the landscape. By doing so, it complicates our understanding of landscape change, with the process of hedgerow removal, for instance, seen as part of much wider social, economic, cultural and agricultural changes. Consequently, the present concern for hedgerow replacement should, likewise, be viewed within its wider context of the British countryside going through a period of change in terms of its meaning and purpose.

#### FIGURE 3 NEAR HERE

The neatly and newly laid hedge that is protected by a wire fence has no meaning or purpose within a seven year crop rotation system, but makes perfect sense in the present climate of countryside and environmental management. Each of the oral history examples, however, re-enforce a level of scepticism towards the ‘one size fits all’ approach that is so common in present day agri-environmental policies. The UK’s Countryside Stewardship Scheme for instance, offers incentive payments to landowners where hedgerows “can be restored by management that follows traditional practices, reflects local customs, [and] uses local materials”, with more specific objectives to “regenerate hedgerows and hedge trees by laying, coppicing and planting where these are mismanaged, overgrown or over-trimmed, and re-plant along old hedge lines”.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that within these management ‘prescriptions’ hedges have been reinterpreted in terms of their aesthetic and ecological value, with little reference to any functional value and how this may impact on their development, location and form. This enthusiasm to ‘museumify’ the landscape should be recognized as a present-centred concern – the latest construction in terms of the countryside’s meaning and purpose, while policies that are aimed at the one-dimensional (re)-introduction of ‘traditional’ or ‘ancient’ practices should be seen as a search for the Holy Grail.

Teasing out some of the implications of this small-scale oral history case study, this paper now turns to a broader discussion of landscape heritage and the ‘community’, drawing upon ideas of social value, the cultural turn within the social sciences and the construction of knowledge.

### **Landscape heritage and the community**

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<sup>28</sup> Burel and Baudry, 'Social, Aesthetic and Ecological Aspects of Hedgerows in Rural Landscapes as a Framework for Greenways', Petit et al., 'Field Boundaries in Great Britain: Stock and Change between 1984, 1990 and 1998.'

<sup>29</sup> DEFRA, *The Countryside Stewardship Scheme: Information and How to Apply* 28-29.

With the statutory national heritage organisations, as well as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), all supporting a heritage agenda of social inclusion, democracy and community participation, recent years have witnessed an ever-increasing affirmation of social value as a guiding principle of heritage practice.<sup>30</sup> Statutory regulation and assessment, together with such agencies' fiscal control, has meant that consciousness of measurable public utility and demonstrable community benefit has now become one of the most basic aims of the entire 'heritage community'. In order to obtain funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for instance, an applicant must fulfil various stringent criteria concerning community engagement and widening access, reflecting the HLF's commitment to develop "the widest possible constituency for heritage, and to promote access, equality of opportunity and inclusion in all its activities".<sup>31</sup> This very laudable concern for community inclusion and public benefit reflects a widening of the recognition, long supported within the academic literature, of heritage itself as a heterogeneous and somewhat fluid term, or *process* that ultimately resides within the unfixed experiences and consciousness of the individual.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the sentiment that heritage can never be reducible to a fixed and physical certainty, or homogenous practice is also reflected by the HLF's self-proclaimed and revealing mission to "listen carefully to the changing ways in which an evolving society values the past".<sup>33</sup> Despite such encouraging messages, however, Brown *et al.* note the existence of a dichotomy, at least within the field of public participation in landscape heritage and community archaeology, between a rapidly expanding armchair audience and 'media-friendly' popular appeal on the one hand, and a static, or even decreasing level of direct public participation on the other.<sup>34</sup> It seems that while the so-called '*Timeteam* factor' may indeed be encouraging the public's appetite for landscape heritage, its contribution may be falling short of the inclusive direct public engagement that both policy makers and the wider heritage community desire. Brown *et al.*'s own response to this perceived lack of direct community engagement in landscape studies resulted in a *Community Landscape Project* (CLP), based at the University of Exeter, and aimed at engaging 'ordinary' members of the public to get directly involved in various practices of archaeological science, including field surveys, laboratory work, archival research and computer digitisation.<sup>35</sup> Whether measured according to the numbers of people involved and their immensely positive feedback, or according to the scientific advances made, the CLP has been an undoubted success.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, for a UK perspective, see DCMS's *The Historic Environment; A Force for the Future*; The Heritage Lottery Fund's *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage* (2002). For an English perspective, see English Heritage publications such as *Heritage Counts* (2003), *State of the Historical Environment Report* (2002); and *The Power of Place* (2000); For a Scottish view, see Historic Scotland's idiosyncratically named *Passed to the Future* (2001); For Wales, see CADW's more prosaically named *Review of the Historic Environment in Wales* (2001). Also see websites for DCMS, EH, HLF, Countryside Agency etc..

<sup>31</sup> [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk). (Accessed 26/7/04).

<sup>32</sup> Harvey, 'Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies', Howard, *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity*.

<sup>33</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund, *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage: The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Plan 2002-2007* p.1.

<sup>34</sup> Brown *et al.*, 'Science, Landscape Archaeology and Public Participation: The Community Landscape Project, Devon, UK.'

<sup>35</sup> See the CLP's website at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/projects/devonclp/>, Brown *et al.*, 'Science, Landscape Archaeology and Public Participation: The Community Landscape Project, Devon, UK.'

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Looking beyond the issue of numbers, however, lies the question of the nature of the public's involvement in the construction of knowledge and understanding about the countryside. More generally, in the wider relationship between landscape studies and the public in Britain is the issue of the level of *value* associated with different categories of landscape knowledge. Put simply, the success of programmes like *Timeteam* is built on the high value given to the opinions and experience of highly educated 'in house experts', and artefact-orientated positivist scientific endeavour in general. Correspondingly, these traditional approaches to landscape heritage and archaeological interpretation often appear to place much less value in community or lay, non-expert accounts. Where public involvement does occur, at 'community digs' and in field walking for instance, the nature of the engagement most often takes the form of scientific complicity, bringing extra hands to act as 'trowel fodder' to help the professionals produce 'expert knowledge', with close guidance and supervision of traditional and scientific techniques.<sup>37</sup>

With respect to how academic archaeology may engage with community centred constructions of knowledge, Symonds outlines how the so-called post-processual turn in archaeology, and particularly the work of contemporary and historical archaeologists, may contribute to the development of social cohesion.<sup>38</sup> Rather than placing a singular, expert knowledge of 'special sites' at the centre of academic enquiry, Symonds notes the importance of the archaeology of the mundane and everyday, creating space for previously unheard voices, for ambiguity, and for different ways of perceiving *value* within a more consciously community centred project.<sup>39</sup> Notwithstanding Symond's comments, reflecting a more widespread movement within academic enquiry, there still appears to be a gap between the community-orientated desires of such statutory bodies as English Heritage, or the Countryside Agency, and the direct engagement of the public.<sup>40</sup> This arises, not in terms of physical access, nor even in terms of consultation over such issues as heritage presentation, but rather in terms of the actual construction of knowledge about the landscape: its development, meaning and dimensions of value. In this sense, the issue of 'community engagement' is too often seen as being a problem of communicating the scientifically constructed and expert-directed 'facts' about a physical landscape/artefact. Alternative, and especially non artefact-centred, understandings of the landscape or its heritage, together with community-led constructions of landscape knowledge are rarely given much space, either in academic papers or in on-site 'open access' display and interpretation boards or associated leaflets.

In sum, therefore, the area of landscape heritage studies is in a fairly ambiguous position. There is an increasing suspicion of meta-narratives of landscape development and meaning among academics, who, following Berger's definition of landscape as 'a way of seeing',

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<sup>37</sup> For instance, see Liddle *Community Archaeology*. This paper is not claiming that many present archaeological projects are somehow 'wrong', but merely points out that the questions they are asking are normally set by professional landscape historians and archaeologists, and that both these questions and the techniques employed are partial. While laudable in terms of PR, the democracy suggested through websites and newsletters should not be conflated with a democracy of knowledge production, with funding regimes and academic sensibilities still driven very much towards acclaiming a reliance upon 'scientific fact'. The term 'Trowel Fodder' has been used by, amongst others, Howe, 'Living on the Edge: Working on Short Term Contracts in Archaeology.'

<sup>38</sup> Symonds, 'Historical Archaeology and the Recent Urban Past,' 33. Cf. Buchli and Lucas, *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, Hodder, *Archaeological Theory Today*.

<sup>39</sup> Symonds, 'Historical Archaeology and the Recent Urban Past,' 42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

now recognise the social contingency involved in landscape construction.<sup>41</sup> Also, due to developments in fiscal and policy agendas over the last decade or so, more support has been forthcoming for community-centred heritage projects, particularly for such practices as oral history collection and archival production, in which direct ‘community involvement’ is self-evident.<sup>42</sup> However, despite the supposed public benefit of such projects, we suggest that oral history is often not taken very seriously by academics, and that despite the shift away from positivist scientific approaches to the landscape that is represented by the ‘cultural turn’, display boards and media presentations still rely largely upon expert narratives of landscape development and meaning.<sup>43</sup>

The issue of providing space for non-expert voices of the landscape has recently been tackled by Jones in her study of the recent life-history (or ‘biography’) of the Pictish cross-slab at Hilton of Cadboll, a seaboard township on the Moray coast of north east Scotland.<sup>44</sup> Jones appeals to academics and policy makers alike, to recognise a more developed sense of ‘social value’ in specifically local contexts that makes space for the non-expert voice.<sup>45</sup> Drawing attention away from the “semantic ‘accuracy’ in any absolute sense”, Jones calls for us to provide narratives that are embedded in local history, folklore and symbol.<sup>46</sup> In her study, Jones weaves archaeological, art-historical, heritage, folkloric and oral historical narratives, revealing the Hilton cross-slab to be multidimensional and highly problematic. In particular, drawing on Johnston, Jones establishes the importance of ‘social value’, derived from locally produced and place-specific meanings and narratives that have helped to provide a dis-empowered group of people with a sense of historical engagement and agency.<sup>47</sup>

As well as supporting Symonds’ argument that historical and contemporary archaeological approaches may uncover community-led and non-expert interpretations of the landscape, Jones’ work also provides these alternative narratives with a capacity to empower people, which are able to problematize official sources of knowledge, and even to challenge more traditional heritage management and interpretational approaches. In terms of scale, Jones exposes the role of the institutional framework that provides the context for official heritage discourse, with the ‘national scale’ institutions represented by Historic Scotland and The National Museum of Scotland, unable to adequately respond to the inherently local, personal and particular narratives of place and ownership that surround the Hilton cross-slab. In terms of heritage interpretation and management, however, Jones demonstrates just how useful an oral history approach can be, not just for the purposes of animating more traditional approaches, but also in terms of offering alternatives that can inform a more democratic and inclusive heritage agenda for future management purposes.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

<sup>42</sup> For example, the Cornwall Audio-Visual Archive (CAVA Project), based in Cornwall (see <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ics/cava.html>), and the Exmoor Oral History Project, based in Somerset (see <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/archives/exmoor/>) have both received large amounts of funding from both County Councils and the HLF in recent years.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Early Medieval Sculpture and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place: The Case of Hilton of Cadboll*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* xii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>47</sup> Johnston, *What Is Social Value? A Discussion Paper*; Jones, *Early Medieval Sculpture and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place: The Case of Hilton of Cadboll* 41.

Withers has noted that recent work on the history of knowledge has too often emphasized the production of such knowledge within academic contexts, to the relative neglect of its popular making and reception.<sup>49</sup> In regions such as Devon, despite the inordinate affect that agriculture has had on the landscape, it is ironic that the farmers themselves have often been written out of the process of constructing knowledge about this landscape. It is important, therefore, that oral testimony is used to allow such groups to ‘speak out of a community’ and for their different moral positions to be recognized.<sup>50</sup> By placing such narratives as those concerned with hedgerow maintenance or that of the burial mound/cattle ramp (above) into an academic context, the “different and frequently conflicting ways of being-in-the-world” are foregrounded.<sup>51</sup> As Setten continues, it is through understanding this moral landscape that “allows us to identify the dialectics and contradictions inherent in the production of landscape, and the ways rules and regulations for appropriate behaviour are the result of these contradictions”.<sup>52</sup> The recognition of social value in this respect, is not important because some value or other should be described as *right* or *wrong*, but because they indicate cultural plurality – and often ambiguity – within which notions of *rightness* or *wrongness* are formulated, maintained, contested and changed.<sup>53</sup> This itself, forces us as academics to reflect on our position as mediators of such knowledge and values.<sup>54</sup> Rather than trying to impose ‘truths’ that are derived from abstract theory, therefore, Burgess argues that we need to make space for the situated and contextualized knowledges of (local) informants, alongside our recognition of these informants’ relationship with (and wider role of) ourselves as researchers.<sup>55</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

Recent years have seen a greater recognition of the potential of oral histories to contribute to our understandings of the past. However, for purposes of exploring and explaining the development of the landscape, especially from an archaeological perspective, expert-led accounts still dominate an often linear narrative that informs both academic and policy debates.<sup>56</sup> It is argued here that oral histories of the landscape should be taken seriously. On one level they can improve the value and meaning of our positivist knowledge, in terms of animating and humanizing the physical landscape. At another level, however, oral histories can both destabilise the linear and scientifically derived narratives of landscape development, and also offer alternative, personally or socially embedded narratives that reflect the contingency of all processes of knowledge production – to allow a hidden community to ‘speak out’.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Early Medieval Sculpture and the Production of Meaning, Value and Place: The Case of Hilton of Cadboll*.

<sup>49</sup> Withers ‘Memory and the history of geographical knowledge’, p. 317. See also Lorimer ‘Telling small stories: spaces of knowledge and the practice of geography’.

<sup>50</sup> Setten ‘Farming the heritage’.

<sup>51</sup> Setten ‘The habitus, the rule and the moral landscape’, p. 389.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Burgess ‘Situating knowledges’, p. 284. Burgess draws on the work of O’Brien and Guernier ‘Values and the environment’.

<sup>54</sup> Nast ‘The politics of knowing’.

<sup>55</sup> Burgess ‘Situating knowledges’, p. 274.

<sup>56</sup> Burgess ‘Situating knowledges’.

<sup>57</sup> Setten ‘Farming the heritage’. An important part of this AHRB-funded project was the production of an exhibition, which toured venues in Devon. The unique oral archive is now held at the AHRB’s Archaeological Data Service, held at York.

In terms of adding value, oral history may give the landscape ‘expert’ access to information that would otherwise be lost or go unrecorded. Arguably, value is also given through the grounded and highly personalised nature and form of oral history. For instance, the poetic style and vernacular forms of speech adds a sense of belonging – even an aura of ‘authenticity’, perhaps the most troublesome and ambiguous factor in the heritage debate. In Devon, a farmer’s recollection of the operation of a system of leets provides an excellent example of how oral history can animate an otherwise dry arena of landscape study:

*Some of those fields were fertilised by streams, which came through the yard. You had a stream, which came through the farmyard, which picked up nutrition from the dung heap. ...You had this huge heap of dung and straw and the seepage from that would seep into the stream and the stream would go down and water the meadows, so it was a form of fertilising the meadows. [...] You kept it clean near the top of the yard, then it would go through the yard where the cattle would drink and then down to the lower fields. ...There were those who would tip a load of dung into the stream, just so the water was taking on some nutrients. If you had steep land you took contours on from the steep ground, say every 20 yards down the hill. You’d block the stream and make it run through that channel and make it soak over the ground. Then after a while, you’d stop it going along that channel and go down and open up another channel and these channels were opened up every year.*

While a close and careful survey, both on the ground, and using aerial photographs, might reveal a good deal of information about the use of leets for transporting water and nutrients on a farm, the personalised account of the farmer adds depth, sophistication and humanised meaning to the account of landscape development. Arguably, therefore, it helps to turn a one-dimensional scientific explanation of the physical form of the landscape into multi-faceted narrative of landscape heritage. The leets are not ‘just’ physical artefacts, nor even simple conveyances of water and muck. Rather, they are part of a humanised landscape that conveys meaning and personalised social experience.

Interest in landscape heritage, whether articulated through academic study, government policy, television or other media coverage, or simply through trips to the countryside has never been so high profile. People want to see it, visit it, write about it, photograph it, excavate it and protect it. A common strand in this interest, however, has been a continued trend to *fetishize* the material artefact. Fetishization of the archive is a fairly standard criticism of unreflective historical practice, often aired by those who press for further use of oral history.<sup>58</sup> Samuel for instance, argued that academic training pre-disposed us to give a privileged place to the written word, and to hold the visual and the verbal in comparatively low esteem, adding that “modern conditions of research seem to dictate an almost complete detachment from the material environment”.<sup>59</sup> To the recognition that we overly rely on the written archive, therefore, may be added a level of fetishization within the field of landscape heritage, of the physical artefact, whereby the scientific and expert-

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*.

<sup>59</sup> Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* 269. Samuel was at the forefront of emancipatory history, which sought to give a voice to groups, whose histories remained unrecorded in the privileged written record. He was therefore a keen advocate of oral history as an alternative line of enquiry.

driven interpretation of the landscape is seen as the only means through which academic progress and policy formation can be made.

In terms of academia, the ‘palimpsestual’ approach tends to generate a high level of reliance on both the written archive and the material artefact, together with a sense of deference towards the recognized ‘expert’ who leads a profoundly scientific undertaking. Although the ‘palimpsestual’ approach has undergone critical examination by geographers and others, influenced by the so-called ‘cultural turn’, this essentially artefact-based approach has often been taken for granted by television documentaries that seek to *explain* the development of the physical landscape. Within this paper, space has been opened for oral history to be seen as a legitimate form of data, which is of value to landscape historians, archaeologists and conservationists alike. It has been seen that such histories can be used to augment and even problematize scientific approaches, recognizing the social contingency in landscape construction, and allowing locally embedded landscapes to be uncovered.

The oral history examples outlined in this paper, from the usage of burial mounds for cattle ramps or the tipping of slurry into leets, to the everyday realities of seeing hedgerows not as aesthetic objects, but as functional barriers between fields, convey the fundamental difference between getting to know a landscape from an academic point of view, and getting to know a landscape through the experience of agriculturally productive work.<sup>60</sup> The recognition of these different and conflicting moral geographies of landscape opens up the issue of how such landscape knowledge is used to inform policy, both in terms of agri-environmental governance, and in terms of heritage practice. Despite calls for farmers to be incorporated as “knowledgable rather than ignorant agents” for instance, most agri-environmental schemes have, to date, gained authority from relying on scientific models and experiments to define appropriate management practices.<sup>61</sup> In this respect there is a need on the one hand to persuade policy makers that there are alternative conceptions of the landscape and different methodological approaches that are able to tap into these alternative strands of knowledge construction. On the other hand, however, we also feel that there is perhaps a need to persuade the followers of the cultural or post-processual turn, who have a passion for ‘high’ social theory, that policy-relevant studies of cultural practice are worthy of their attention.<sup>62</sup>

The paper has recognized that the landscape is far from stable, even in what are commonly seen as the ‘permanent’ pasturelands of Devon. As Bender suggests, the “landscape is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it”.<sup>63</sup> Rather than the one dimensional and static connotation that the ‘ancient landscape’ epithet implies, we should view Devon’s landscape as having a dynamic biography of change in both form and meaning. Devon’s landscape should be understood and recognised as an early twenty-first century landscape that is seen through twenty-first century eyes, and managed within the context of twenty-first century agendas, fears and desires. The present concern for landscape conservation should be recognised in its context, with acts of preservation seen as direct management that actively construct new landscapes for a forward looking agenda.

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<sup>60</sup> Setten, ‘Farming the heritage’.

<sup>61</sup> Burgess *et al*, ‘Knowledges in action’, pp. 120-126.

<sup>62</sup> Burgess ‘Situating knowledges’, p. 273.

<sup>63</sup> Bender, ‘Landscape - Meaning and Action’ 3.





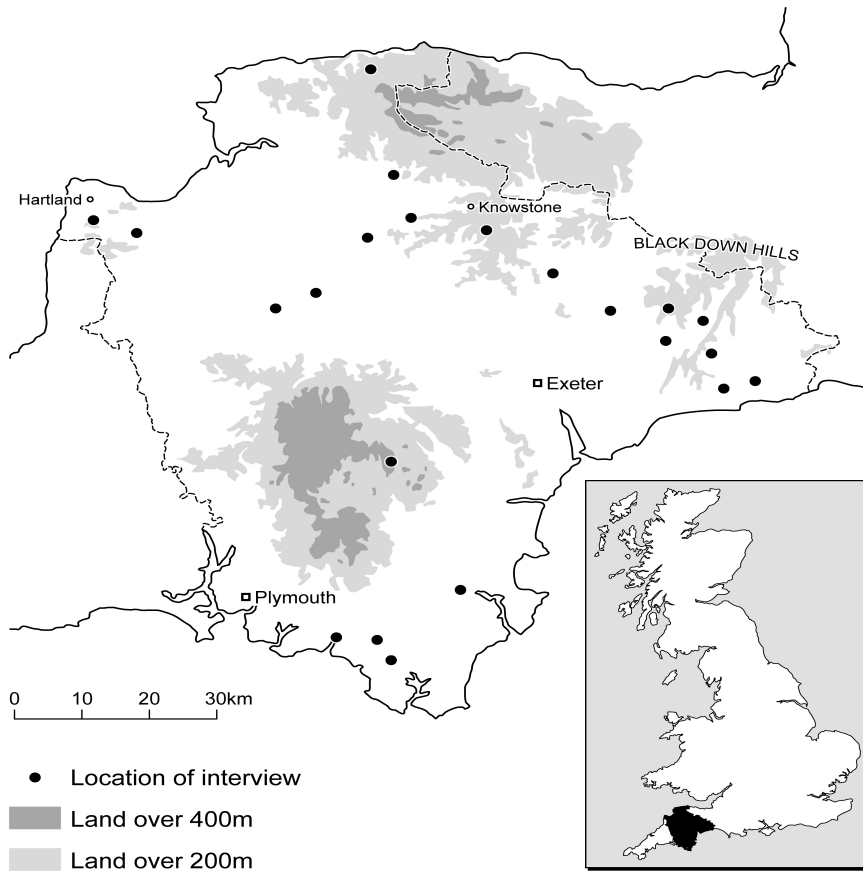
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**Figure 1: The study area and location of interviews**



**Figure 2: The ‘picture postcard’ view of a *typical* Devon landscape**



**Figure 3: Modern managed hedge, protected with an electric fence.**

If this was embedded into a seven-year rotation as described in the text, this hedge would not need barbed wire to make it stock proof.

