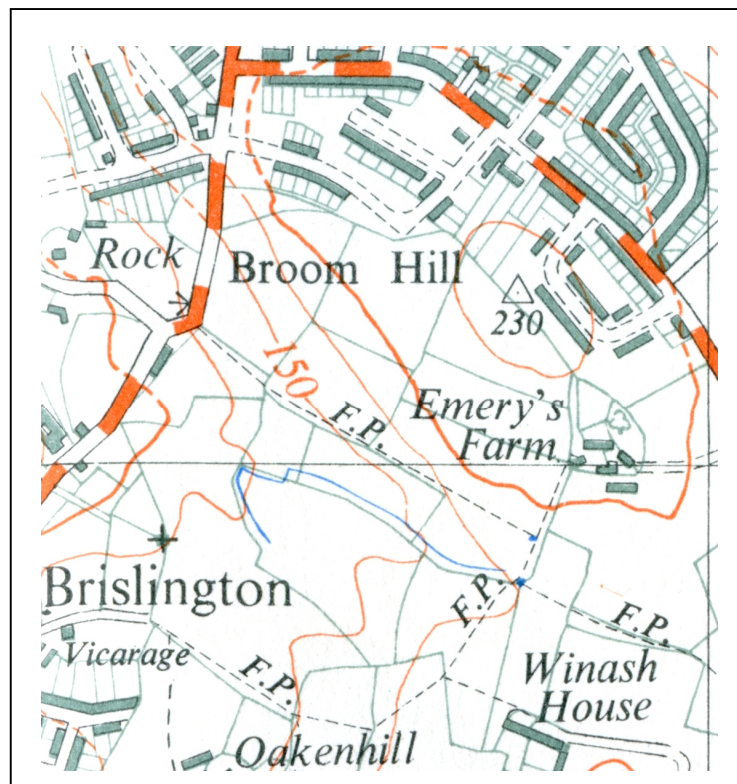


Notes on a likely medieval Priest's Path through Brislington Meadows

A Priest's Path is a traditional route between two ecclesiastical centres - usually between a 'mother' church and its 'daughter' chapel. These paths were used by clergy coming and going between these places, and are often several miles in length because a popular reason for building a chapel in a particular community was the hardship endured by the congregation in travelling a long distance to the original church in all weathers. The path considered here is between the mother church in Keynsham, and the dwelling of the chaplain of the Chapel of St Anne in the Wood (originally the Oratory of New-Wick), which was operational by 1304 (Taylor 2014, 81).

The chaplain's residence is said to have been on or near the site of Wick House, Brislington, which ultimately derives its name from the same source as the oratory - New-Wick (various medieval spellings of which include Nyuwewike, Nywewyk, and Newycke). It is, of course, no coincidence that Wick House is situated on Wick Road. Although the chaplain of the Chapel of St Anne's in the Wood would have been one of the Black Canons of Keynsham Abbey ('black' because of the colour of their monastic cassocks), these canons were fully accredited priests.

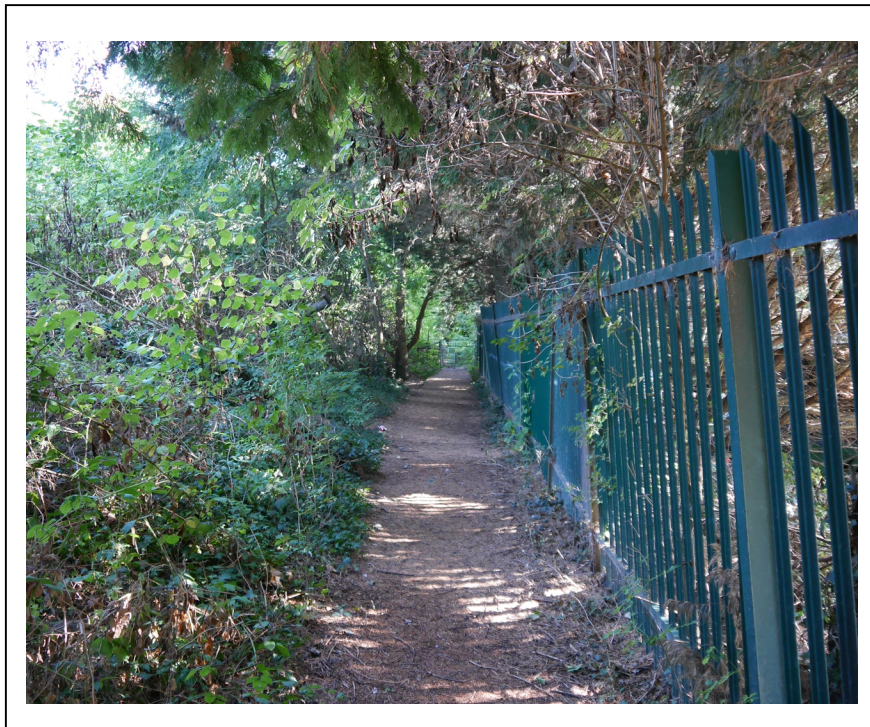
The distance spanned by this proposed Priest's Path is some 4.5km (2.8 miles) as the crow flies, although naturally the path itself is significantly longer. The route is thought to follow approximately that taken by the modern public footpath through Brislington Meadows that still takes the traveller through Brislington Meadows to Keynsham. A section of this path (Ordnance Survey grid reference ST63687023) heads directly toward the tower of the church of St John the Baptist on the horizon (Streetmap 2022). It may though originally have been sighted on the Abbey, which lay immediately behind the church.



The public footpath "F.P." runs from the Rock, southeast through Brislington Meadows (OS map, 1960).

Modern Ordnance Survey (OS) maps show a public right of way through Brislington Meadows from School Road to Bonville Road, which is part of the longer path to Keynsham. Its route through the fields though is significantly different to the path popularly used by people walking through the meadows, and instead closely follows the line of old hedges that run most of that distance (and which used to go further). The route on the modern maps can be traced back through earlier editions and almost exactly follows that on OS maps from nearly 140 years ago (OS 1884).

The path in 1884 matches the modern route exactly except for a minor divergence at its western end near School Road, which was straightened slightly in the mid-20th century, probably to accommodate the erection of the electricity pylon that still stands at the entrance. This section of footpath, between two kissing gates, leads past what appears to be a stock pond (OS grid reference: ST6245671107) - the part of the path beside the pond remained substantially undisturbed by that alteration. This path is of modern construction and runs between metal railings with a row of conifers on the south and allotments to the north,



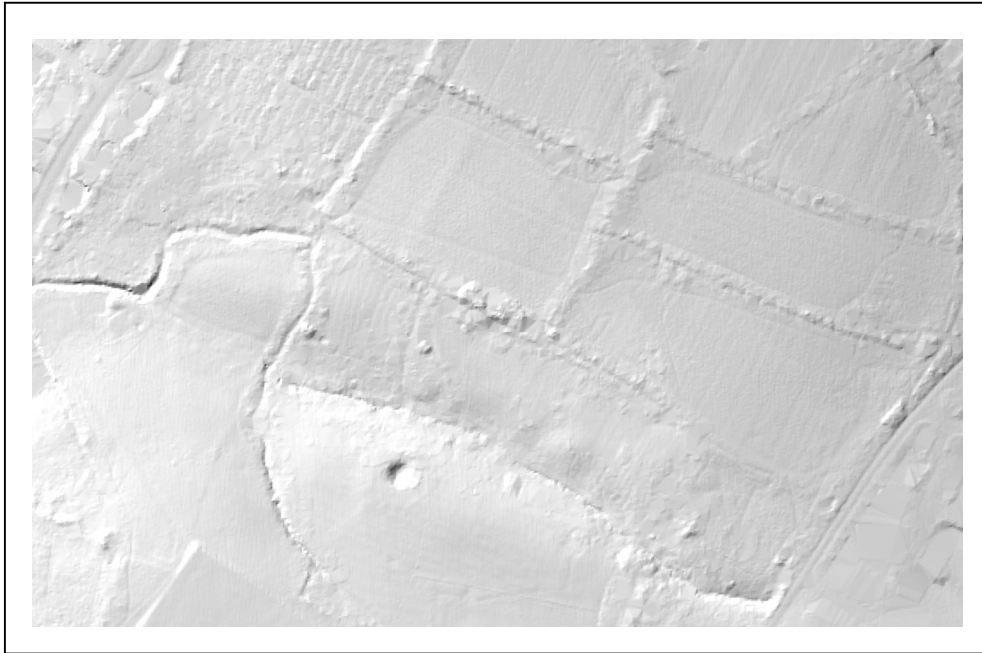
The view toward the stock pond (on the left) and the kissing gate leading to Brislington Meadows (Ken Taylor, 2022).

The 1846 tithe map shows a field boundary where the conifers now stand, but it doesn't show the footpath. However, the tithe map fails to show most of the footpaths in the parish, and often depicts bridges over Brislington Brook as if they existed in isolation. In contrast, the early OS maps reveal the dense network of paths that connected the community - often with more than one converging to cross those same bridges. So, while it's a shame the tithe map ignores our subject path, it's not significant.

As we pass through the kissing gate by the pond, we enter a minor puzzle. The tithe map shows this area as the corner of five fields with hedges making a complex system of junctions that no doubt accommodated a set of field gates. The slightly later OS maps show a simpler system

servicing only four fields (the tithe map's field boundary south of the path was removed, combining those two fields). These maps can be found online (Bristol City Council 2022) and by superimposing them and adjusting their opacity, it becomes evident that the route of the path through this changing landscape remained essentially the same (their alignment on the website isn't optimal at this precise location so, if possible, it's best to download both and perform the superimposition offline).

The modern, well-trodden track then abruptly turns a sharp left, and climbs the riser of a lynchet into the open field, while the old footpath remains on a straight course to the southeast, and closely follows the line of the hedge.



The modern path is visible in this LiDAR image, crossing the 'square' field above the line of the hedge. The prominent crater south of the stream is from the 1942 Blitz (LiDARFinder 2015).

The original path here is quite narrow, and may formerly have been considerably wider. A constriction could have been caused by encroachment from the lynchet riser - which has accumulated around 1m depth of soil here (the lynchet formed as earth moved gradually downhill by ploughing over a long period of time). Elsewhere in Brislington Meadows the ploughing that formed a series of lynchets went right up to the field boundaries, but here it seems the presence of the footpath held it back.

As well as being a 14th century Priest's Path connecting the mother church with the residence of the chaplain of one of its daughter chapels, this ancient route would have provided the people living in the hamlet of the Rock with a conveniently direct way to access their market town of Keynsham - a Thursday market in the town, plus a three-day fair every August, was licenced by the crown as early as 1308 (Lowe 2006, 63).

Ken Taylor
Brislington
Nov 2022

Bibliography

Bristol City Council 2022, *Know Your Place*, <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp> (accessed 26 Oct 2022).

LidAR Finder 2015, LiDARFinder <https://lidarfinder.com>, accessed 11 Nov 2022 (© Environment Agency copyright and/or database right 2015. All rights reserved).

Lowe, Barbara 2006, *Keynsham Abbey a Cartulary*, Trafford Publishing.

Ordnance Survey 1884, *Somerset Sheet VI NE*, six-inch to the mile, surveyed 1882 to 1883.

Ordnance Survey 1960, *National Grid Sheet ST67*, scale 1:25,000, published 1951 and reprinted with minor corrections 1960, Chessington Surrey.

Streetmap EU Ltd 2022,
<https://www.streetmap.co.uk/map/idld?X=364597&Y=170039&A=Y&Z=115> (accessed 11 Nov 2022).

Taylor, Ken 2014, *The holy well and the Chapel of St Anne in the Wood, Brislington, Bristol*, Archyve.