

I am contacting you with information regarding a research project which is being initiated by the Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LLAF)*, and which may appeal to some of your members who carry out research into local and family history.

One aspect of this which you may not have considered before, but is a key aspect of social history, is how our forebears moved around in their daily lives before the age of universal car ownership, and even without the benefit of the internal combustion engine or the railway.

The answer of course, is that they created, by usage, a network of footpaths, bridleways and local roads for the few who had a cart or carriage. Many of these of course now form the basis of our local road network, and almost as many are still used as footpaths and bridleways, and are mapped and protected as such by our county council.

Until very recent times, the law could be simply stated as 'once a highway, always a highway', and so they remained irrespective of use. But in 2000 legislation was passed which simply stated that any routes not recognised as public by the highway authority would cease to exist on January 1st 2026.

Our project is to identify such routes in Leicestershire which are still of public benefit, and prepare the necessary claim based on historic evidence that they are indeed a highway, and who is entitled to use them. Finding such evidence will need painstaking checking of historic maps, estate records, railway and canal plans and many other records which could reveal the existence of an unrecorded highway, or existing routes with higher rights than currently claimed. The key records which are regarded as 'good evidence' are Enclosure Awards, Tithe Maps, 1910 Inland Revenue Valuation Maps, Railway and Canal Plans, Estate Maps, and even Sale Particulars for individual properties – many of which may already be familiar to local history researchers with other interests in the management/ownership of and changes to the landscape.

We are in the process of preparing list of routes which merit research, but cannot claim to have found them all, particularly those which may have higher rights (e.g. they are recorded as a footpath, but historic evidence points to a bridleway), and we are building a library of digital records which will be made available to researchers, along with lists of useful websites to allow much research to be carried out at home.

We have the full backing, with financial support, of Leicestershire County Council and various user groups to pursue these aims, but the task is too immense for their limited resources.

Any involvement, however small, can help – researchers may find references to footpaths and bridleways as an incidental to their main area of interest, and such a 'tip-off' could be the key to a full research exercise.

Researchers may also be aware of potentially useful documents which are not held in the public domain, e.g. in personal collections or parish offices or churches. We would be very pleased to hear of these and get access to them. Oral evidence of usage of routes may also strengthen a claim for a route.

A meeting has been arranged when anybody at all interested can come along and learn more without any commitment. They are to meet at 7.30 at Park House, home of Glenfield Parish Council (Stamford Street, LE3 8DL) on November 6th

If you wish to come along and see if you wish to get involved you will be most welcome. It would be helpful if you could notify us in advance of numbers, but pre-booking is not essential.

If you require any further information, or cannot attend the meeting but wish to get involved, please contact Stan Warren: 0116 268 2415 or sjwarren01@outlook.com

*LLAF is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access. Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities and government departments, on access issues.

Stan Warren
Chairman
LLAF Unrecorded Ways Sub-Committee