

Update April 2019

Fieldwalking of Prathall Lane and Gorsey Bank Road

It has been our intention to field walk a number of lanes locally where the lane does not have a modern tarmac surface. Among this list has been Prathall Lane and Gorsey Bank Road, both of which are on the east side of Gorsey Bank at Wirksworth and both of which are now restricted byways, although the Gorsey Bank Road name suggests perhaps it shouldn't be.

The two lanes are slightly different in character. Prathall Lane, which runs south from Gorsey Bank, gives every impression of being a pack horse route, it has a very pronounced holloway at its Gorsey Bank end and runs in a rather haphazard way towards Holehouse Farm and Taylors Lane at Ashleyhay. It turns in places at near right-angled bends, notably near Kings Fields and near Holehouse Farm and is narrow between its field walls, being two and a quarter metres wide at best.

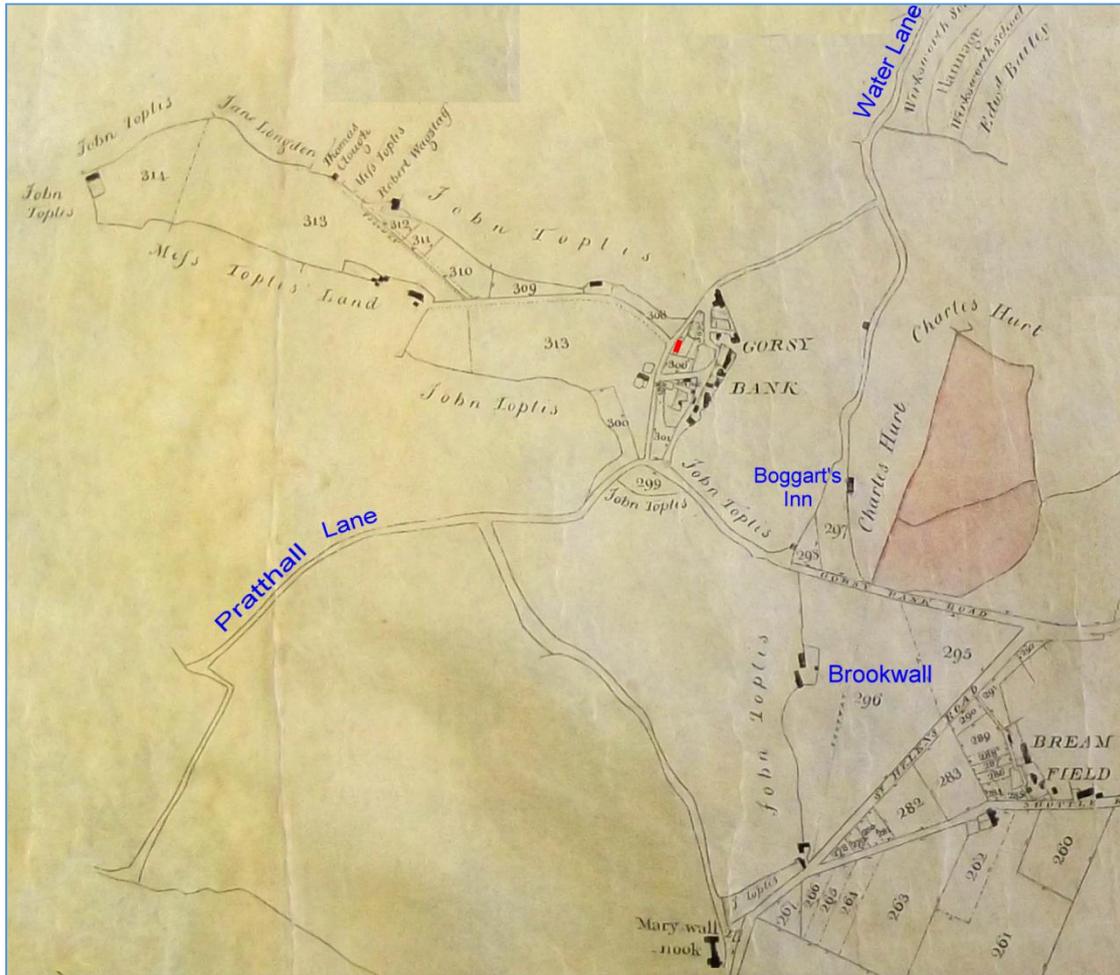


Prathall Lane looking south towards Ashleyhay.

The surface is badly rutted and muddy from farm vehicles and the surface is of tipped small limestone with modern rubble and broken brick of all kinds. It is shown on Samuel Hutchinson's 1709 map of the Gell Estate at Wirksworth, which also shows a related lane running from it eastwards to Hardhurst Farm (called in 1709 Mary Wall Nook), referred to as the Way to the Moor and still present on maps until 1837. This latter lane has not survived except as a relict footpath.

Gorsey Bank Road runs north, north-east also from Gorsey Bank, a little above the former Boggart's Inn and below Brookwall Farm. It is wider, gentler and slightly less pastoral than Prathall Lane. It is, however, equally neglected and rutted. The surface appears similar to Prathall Lane, that is again of tipped limestone with modern rubble and broken brick of all kinds, but in this case this modern tipping appears to overlay a grit-stone road which is ditched on either side. The ditching is badly neglected permitting flooding and small streams to run down the ruts, these rivulets and the stream in the west ditch may have supplied Providence Mill with water via a leat.

In terms of the fieldwalking, Prathall Lane has a very few brown-glazed earthenware shards in its surface. Gorsey Bank Road has rather more pottery along it, also brown glazed shards as well as bits of china and pieces of salt glazed stoneware. There were no querns or worked stone in the field walls as far as could be seen given their condition. Nothing older than the post medieval pottery was found on either lane.



Prathall Lane and Gorse Bank Road in 1806

The above map is an extract of the 1806 enclosure map of Wirksworth. It is not a complete map, it doesn't show all features, but it is the earliest useful map of Gorse Bank (the 1709 map has no detail). North is on the right. The Gorse Bank place-name first appears in 1620 in the Gell records, although an earlier reference to "Gorsteleze" (gorse clearing in the woods) in 1539 probably represents it. Providence Mill is shown in red. At the junction of Prathall Lane and Gorse Bank Road ("Gorsy Bank Road" on the map) is an enclosure owned by John Toplis which appears to have been a quarry. As usual we would be delighted to hear of any more historical details. The current Providence Mill wasn't built until 1881 but replaced an earlier tape mill apparently owned by the Tatlows in 1823 and before that a saw mill.