

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

SADDLEWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MIKE BUCKLEY

Objections 261 and 65

NETWORK RAIL STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE

TRANSPORT WORKS ACT ORDER

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. I am Mike Buckley, a representative of Saddleworth Historical Society and I am supporting the Moorgate Footbridge Campaign in respect of heritage.

1.2. I have been a member of the Society for over 50 years, have authored several books on the history of Saddleworth and for eight years I was a member of Oldham Council, part of the time acting as Heritage Champion.

1.3. The Society has been in existence since 1966. Presently there are over 270 members, roughly half living in Saddleworth and the rest in other parts of the United Kingdom and overseas. Sixteen members live in the USA and Canada and twelve in Australia and New Zealand. All share a strong interest in their native district or the land where their ancestors once lived and worked, and all value its rich history and heritage. The Society curates a large archive of historic material and over the last 60 years has published many books on Saddleworth history. It also publishes a quarterly journal, the *SHS Bulletin*, which contains varied items of historical interest and research articles on a wide range of topics relating to the history of the district.

2. OBJECTIONS

Saddleworth Historical Society objections to the proposed closure of the level crossing at Moorgate, Uppermill and the re-routing of Footpath 209 from Dark Lane, Uppermill.

The reasons for the objection are on heritage grounds:

- The path is an important heritage asset: the survival of a medieval inter-regional route and a local churchway.
- the proposal would close Dark Lane, a hollow way and an ancient and important landscape feature. It is important to keep the evidence of the ancient route maintained and in use.
- Diverting the footpath would lead to a loss of the primary purpose of the ancient route which was to travel in a direct line to the church and as an Inter-regional route.

3. AN IMPORTANT HERITAGE ASSET

3.1. Ancient Inter-Regional Routes through Saddleworth

3.1.1. Footpath 209 is part of a network of ancient inter-regional routes that were primarily focussed on the Stanedge crossing, the narrowest point of the Central Pennines. They were in existence at least as far back as the Bronze age, and probably earlier¹. They compare with other inter-regional prehistoric routes such as the Ridgeway, along the chalk ridge from Wiltshire to the Thames and the Ickneild Way, running from Dorset to East Anglia.

3.1.2. There were three main north-south routes which converged at the Stanedge crossing. The first of these was no doubt the most important from a strategic and military perspective. The Roman Road from Manchester to York crossed here. After his harrying of the North the Conqueror travelled to subdue insurrection in Cheshire. Hartley Bateson makes a convincing case that he would have travelled the route of the old Roman Road or its successor through Saddleworth.²

¹ B. Barnes, *Passage through Time; Saddleworth Roads and Trackways A History*, Saddleworth Historical Society (1981), p. 6; I.A. Richmond, *Huddersfield in Roman Times*, (Huddersfield, 1925), p. 24; W.M. Bowman, *England in Ashton-under-Lyne*, (Ashton, 1960), p. 9.

² Hartley Bateson, 'When the Conqueror's Army stormed up Honeywell Lane', Article in *Oldham Chronicle*, c.1960.

3.1.3. Another of these north-south routes was a ridgeway from Stanedge down Harrop Edge, over a ford at Tamewater in Dobcross, then over Wharmton, and down the ridgeway over Quick Edge towards Ashton-under Lyne.

3.1.4. From east to west there were two other inter-regional routes across the Pennines which passed through Saddleworth.. The most important of these was from Rochdale through Denshaw, Grange and Dobcross, past Saddleworth Church then over Clarke's Lane and Slades to join a moorland track, Bleakgate, over Saddleworth Moor to Holmfirth and beyond.

3.1.5. Part of a link route joining all three north-south routes started at Wharmton and joined the east-west way from Rochdale to Holmfirth above Saddleworth Church to form the eastern part of another inter-regional route. Footpath 209, formed part of this.

3.1.6. The routes are illustrated in Figure 1.

3.1.7. In the Middle Ages through traffic placed Saddleworth in a favourable position for trade, particularly of wool and cloth. These ancient ways were the trade routes until the building of the Turnpike roads in the late eighteenth century. Although unsuited to wheeled traffic, they were, nevertheless, heavily used by packhorse and packhorse trains. A petition for a bridge at Tamewater in 1755 gave evidence that:

*'There were no less than One Hundred Horses loadened besides Numbers of Travellers every day (except Sunday) passing and repassing over the said Water when the same is passable'*³.

3.1.8. After the eighteenth century some of these early routes formed the course of later Turnpike Roads, others were improved to be able to take wheeled traffic, but others, such as Footpath 209, remained as bridleways or footpaths.

3.2. Footpath 209

3.2.1. Highlighted in blue in Figure 1, Footpath 209's importance as a key component in the east-west route through Saddleworth is clear. Dry Clough Lane and Dark Lane were originally directly connected with Church Road via a ford in Uppermill. This is shown on a 1766 estate map (Figure 2) and the full extent of the route through Saddleworth is clear from the Manorial Map of 1770 (Figures 3 and 4).⁴ It is shown in greater detail on the first full map of Saddleworth published in 1822.⁵ The route is also shown on county maps of the early nineteenth century. The first reference to Dark Lane is on the first 6" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey map of 1854.⁶

3.2.2. Bernard Barnes, provides evidence that, from the Middle Ages until the Turnpike Era, the route of Footpath 209 performed the role of a churchway; a local route that gave access to Saddleworth parish church for residents in the west of the township and one that played an important role in providing, not only weekly access to the church for divine services, but also for burials, the deceased having to be carried to the church on packhorses over this rough track.⁷ Deeds and court records provide ample evidence that the west of Saddleworth was populated as far back as

³ West Yorkshire Archives (Wakefield), Quarter Session Records, Pontefract, April 1755, Box 158, quoted in Barnes, 1981, p. 84.

⁴ See the Giles Shaw Estate Map (1766) and Map of James Farrar's Enclosures (1770) in M. Buckley et al. (eds), *Mapping Saddleworth II*, Saddleworth Historical Society (2010), pp. 18 and 54.

⁵ M. Buckley et al. (eds), *Mapping Saddleworth II*, pp. 200/201.

⁶ M. Buckley et al. (eds), *Mapping Saddleworth I*, pp. 68/69.

⁷ Barnes, *Passage through Time*, pp. 16-17.

the thirteenth century so the route would have then been well used locally for many centuries.

3.2.3. Apart from its importance as a churchway, as has already been shown, it formed part of an inter-regional route over Slades towards Holmfirth and beyond. As such it would almost certainly have been in existence before the church's foundation in the early fourteenth century. Howcroft drew attention to the early east-west route probably predating the church.⁸ (Figure 5)

3.3. Wharmton - an early landmark

At a time when landmarks were largely natural features, cross roads were important as meeting places and points of reference in the landscape. Such central points were sometimes marked by a stone, a gallows, or a cross. The junction of Footpath 209 with Burn Edge Lane, part of the north-south route passing over Wharmton, would have been such a place. An early thirteenth century charter granting newly enclosed land nearby (Figure 6) refers to a white cross in the vicinity which most probably stood at this important road junction.⁹

3.4. A neglected Heritage Asset

Most designated heritage assets relate to the built environment, which in Saddleworth is largely a creation of the eighteenth century or later. But the heritage of an early period, despite being evident everywhere in the landscape, goes largely unrecognised and undesignated. Since the publication of Hoskins' pioneering work in 1955,¹⁰ features such as field patterns, dry stone walls, watercourses, ancient ways, ridge and furrow plough marks, hedge and bank boundaries, sunken lanes and other earthworks are now recognised as important surviving evidence of the past. But most of this is still without any form of designation. Footpath 209 is an example: a visible heritage asset dating back to pre-history, only part of which, that part in the Uppermill conservation area, is recognised by any form of designation. Its historical importance and value nevertheless is undiminished.

4. THE PROPOSAL WOULD CLOSE DARK LANE, A HOLLOW WAY AND AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE FEATURE.

This is one of the most interesting parts of the route, its sunken nature indicating its extreme age. The nature of the route, narrow and steep illustrates the type of traffic that would have been found on these routes: pedestrians, pack horse trains and travellers on horseback. For this to be experienced and appreciated the path must remain in active use.

5. DIVERTING THE FOOTPATH WOULD LEAD TO A LOSS OF THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE ANCIENT ROUTE WHICH WAS TO TRAVEL IN A DIRECT LINE AS AN INTER-REGIONAL ROUTE AND TO THE CHURCH.

Footpath 244 may serve to preserve a route from Wharmton to Uppermill. But apart from the difficulties with this diversion the detour would render it meaningless as an historic means of getting directly from A to B. The historic meaning and the enjoyment of experiencing the path down Dark Lane would be lost.

Mike Buckley

⁸ A.J. Howcroft, *Supplement to the History of the Chapelry and Church of Saddleworth*, (Oldham, 1933), pp. 5-6.

⁹ Victor Khadem and Mike Buckley, 'Early Saddleworth Records - 6, The Subinfeudation of Shawmere', *SHS Bulletin*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2012), p. 82: 'the location of the white cross would most likely to be on, or close to, the junction of Burnedge Lane and Dry Clough Lane, two medieval routes over Wharmton.'

¹⁰ W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955.

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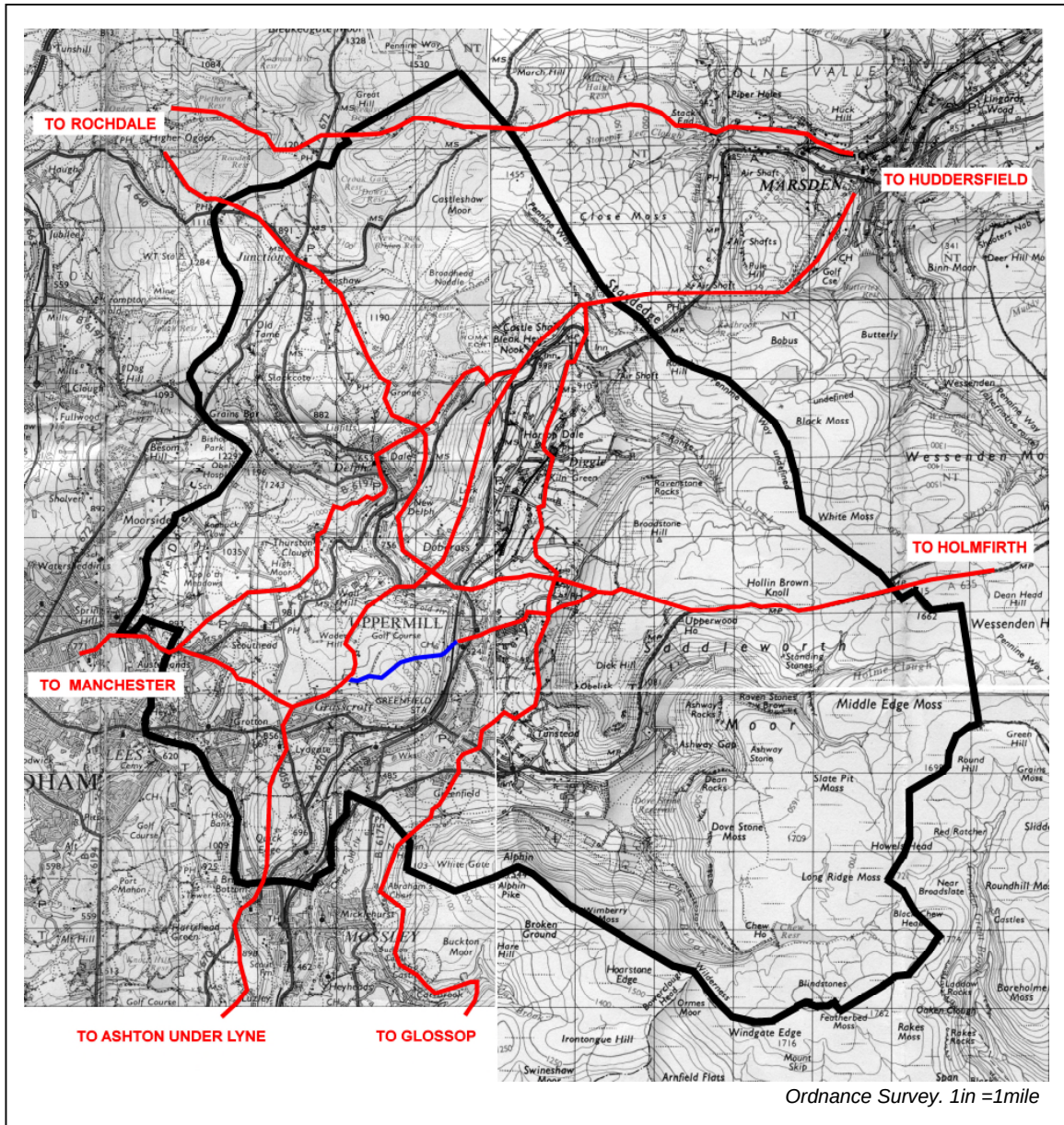


Figure 1. Pre-turnpike period inter-regional routes through Saddleworth (Footpath 209 in blue).

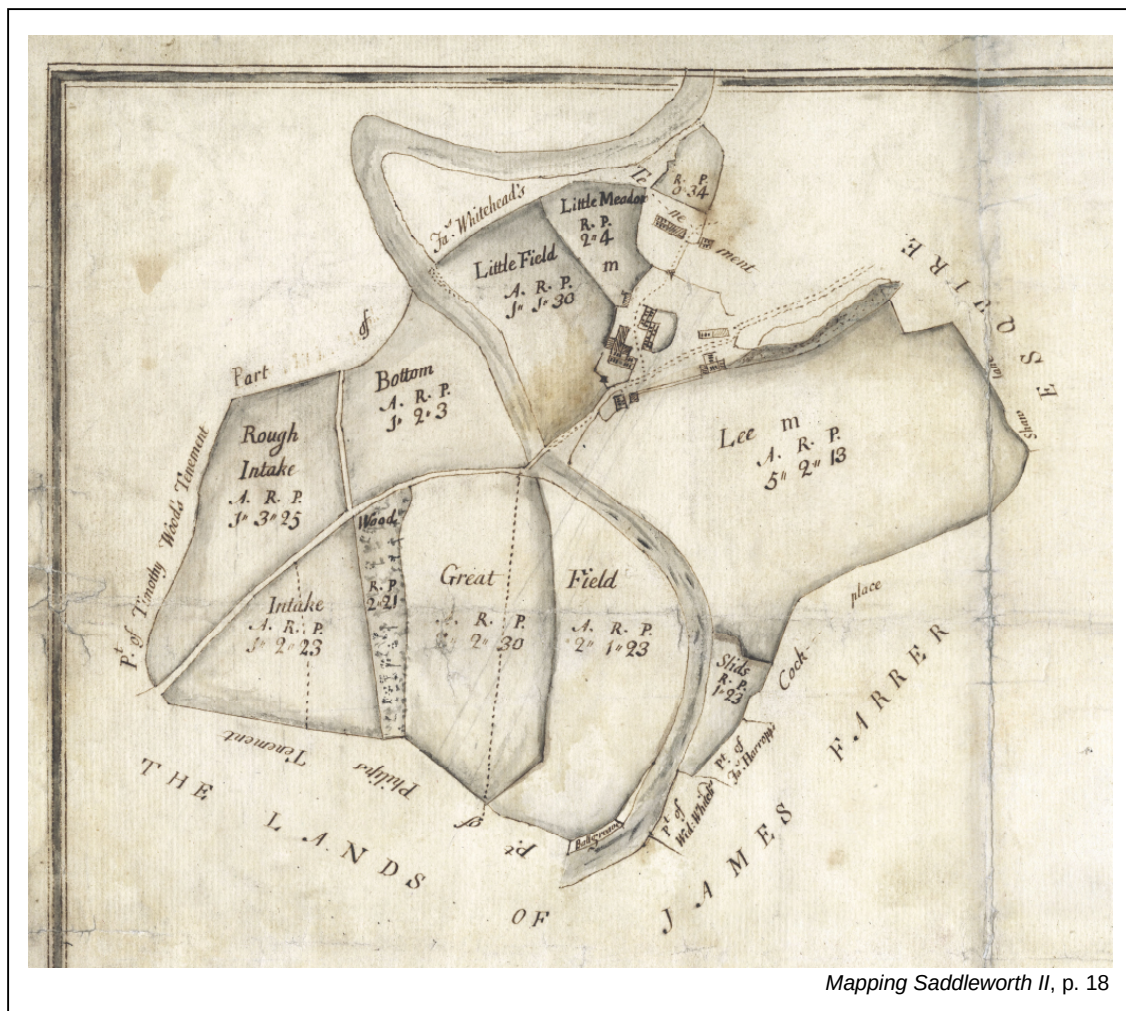


Figure 2. Map of Uppermill (1766) pre-dating the emergence of the village after the building of the canal and turnpike road. The through route, of which Footpath 209 was part, is shown crossing the river Tame and extending up Smithy Lane and Church Road, also the manorial corn mill with its associated mill pond.

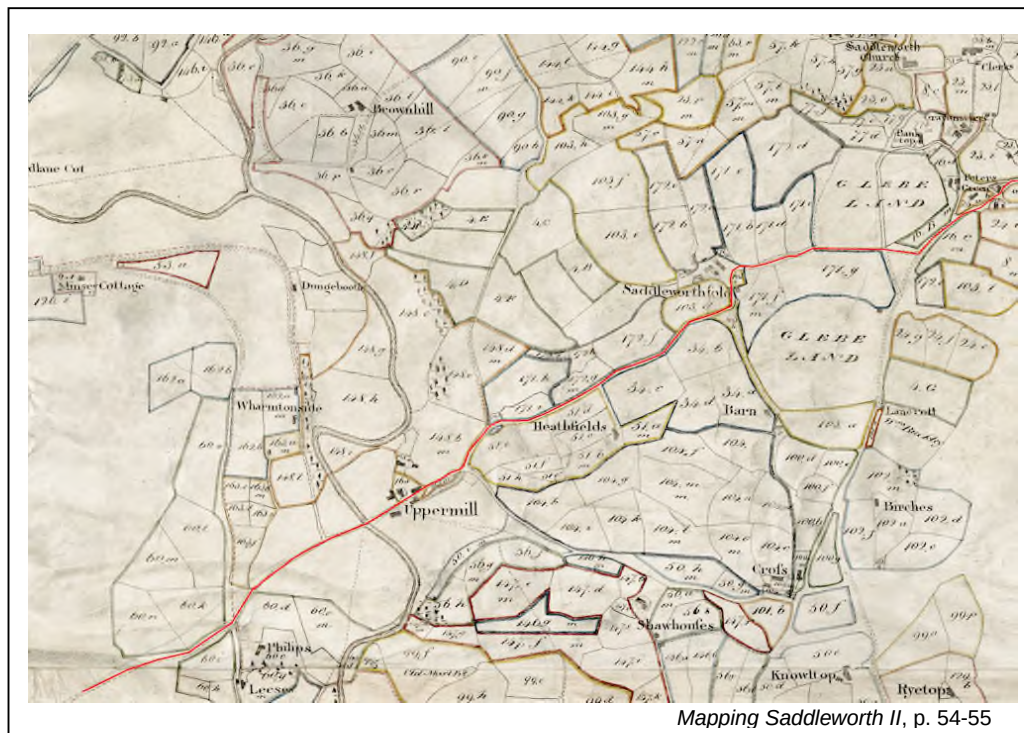


Figure 3. Northern part of the east-west route through Saddleworth (of which Footpath 209 was part) shown on the 1770 Manorial Estate Map.

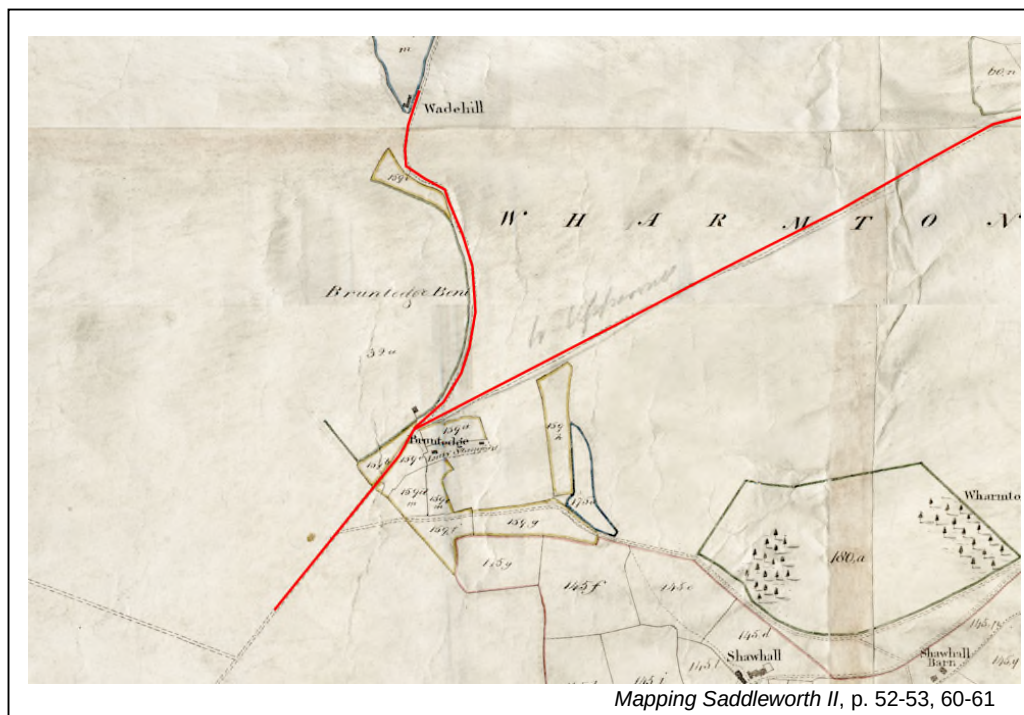


Figure 4. Southern part of the east-west route through Saddleworth (now Footpath 209) shown on the 1770 Manorial Estate Map.

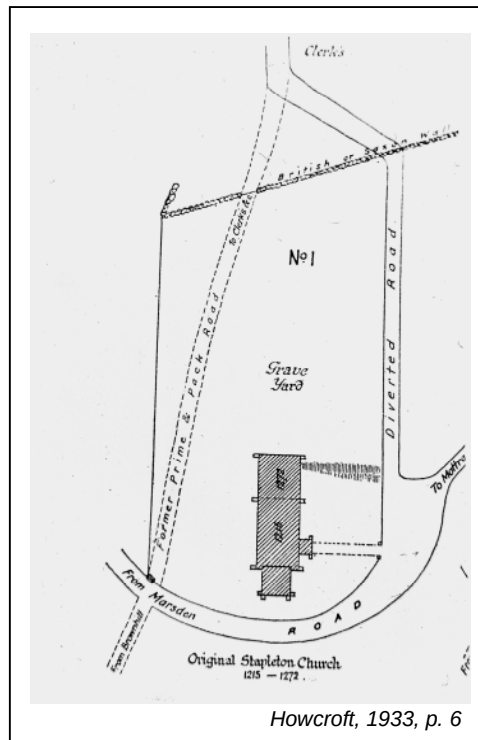


Figure 5. Howcroft's plan of Saddleworth Church and churchyard c. 1215-1272 showing the course of ancient route through the churchyard.

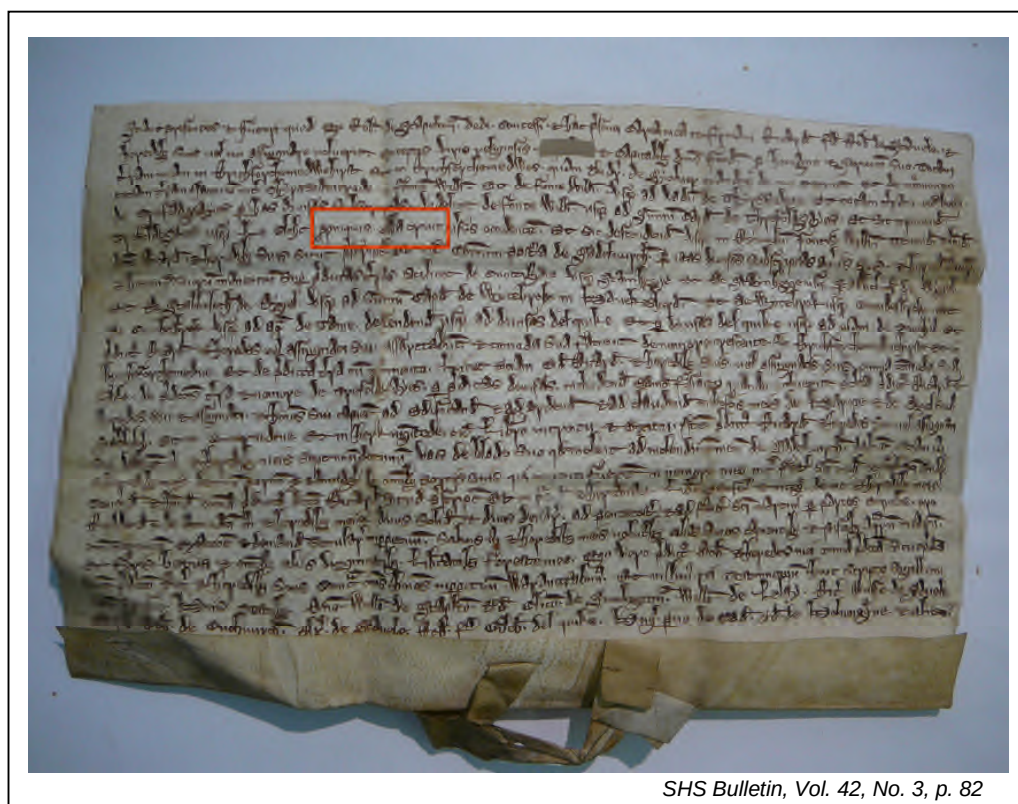


Figure 6. Charter of c.1250 granting land near Wharmton. The words 'propinquis alba cruce' or 'near the white cross' highlighted.