

## DOLE PATH - An historical note

The mediaeval word Dole or Dool refers to a narrow strip of unploughed land used as a boundary marker, typically, but not exclusively, between adjacent fields. The word was first recorded in the early sixteenth century but it probably originated five-hundred years before that, in the period before hedgerows began to supplant ditches as the normal means of separating land-holdings.

In 1881, the first six-inch Ordnance Survey map of the area showed a well-established path running west from the corner of Fyfield Street (now Queen Street) along the boundary between two eight-acre fields until it met the Ongar Road opposite Gypsy Field (Gypsy Mead); just as it does today. For travellers from the Willingale Road heading towards Ongar, the Dole ran in a convenient straight line, bypassing the dog-leg created by the necessity to pass along the Street. This can be seen clearly on the extract of the map accompanying these notes.

By the turn of the twentieth century, houses had been built on the west side of the Street, but people continued to pass along the narrow Dole, between the newly built Fairview Cottages and Roden (nowadays, respectively, Roden Cottages and Roden Villa), either to reach the Ongar Road or to get access to the smallholding land and orchards behind them, which today are occupied by the village field and the houses of Walker Avenue.

Some and possibly all of this land was in the ownership of Mr Henry Lindus who had been recorded as a farmer and brick and tile maker, resident in Fyfield, from at least as early as 1882. Correspondence with the recently-formed Parish Council in 1896, concerning an obstructed footpath, indicates that by that time he was living elsewhere, although retaining his property interests in the village, which were now under the day-to-day supervision of a manager.

Six years later, in 1902, and with a frustrating lack of explanation in the available records. Henry Lindus, now of South Woodford, donated to the parish a strip of land 140 feet in length and 2 feet wide in order to widen the Dole between Fairview Cottages and Roden. The width of the path today suggests that, until the extra strip of land was donated, the Dole was narrow indeed. What is more likely is that the Dole had no formal breadth, nor legal status as a footpath up to that time but that common usage had established the path much as we find it today and that Mr Lindus' gift may simply have regularised a situation which had existed on the ground from time immemorial.

Note on Map: Reconciliation of the topographical contents of this map with the date of its printing (about 1881) is a task I have not attempted. However, the first sheet published by the Trigonometrical Survey of England & Wales was for Essex, in 1805, based upon triangulations made principally in 1798/9. Thereafter, updated editions were made by revising the older plates. Thus some of the information shown, including the Dole, could have been recorded up to eighty years before the advertised date of printing.

Marcus Dain  
Wheel Cottage