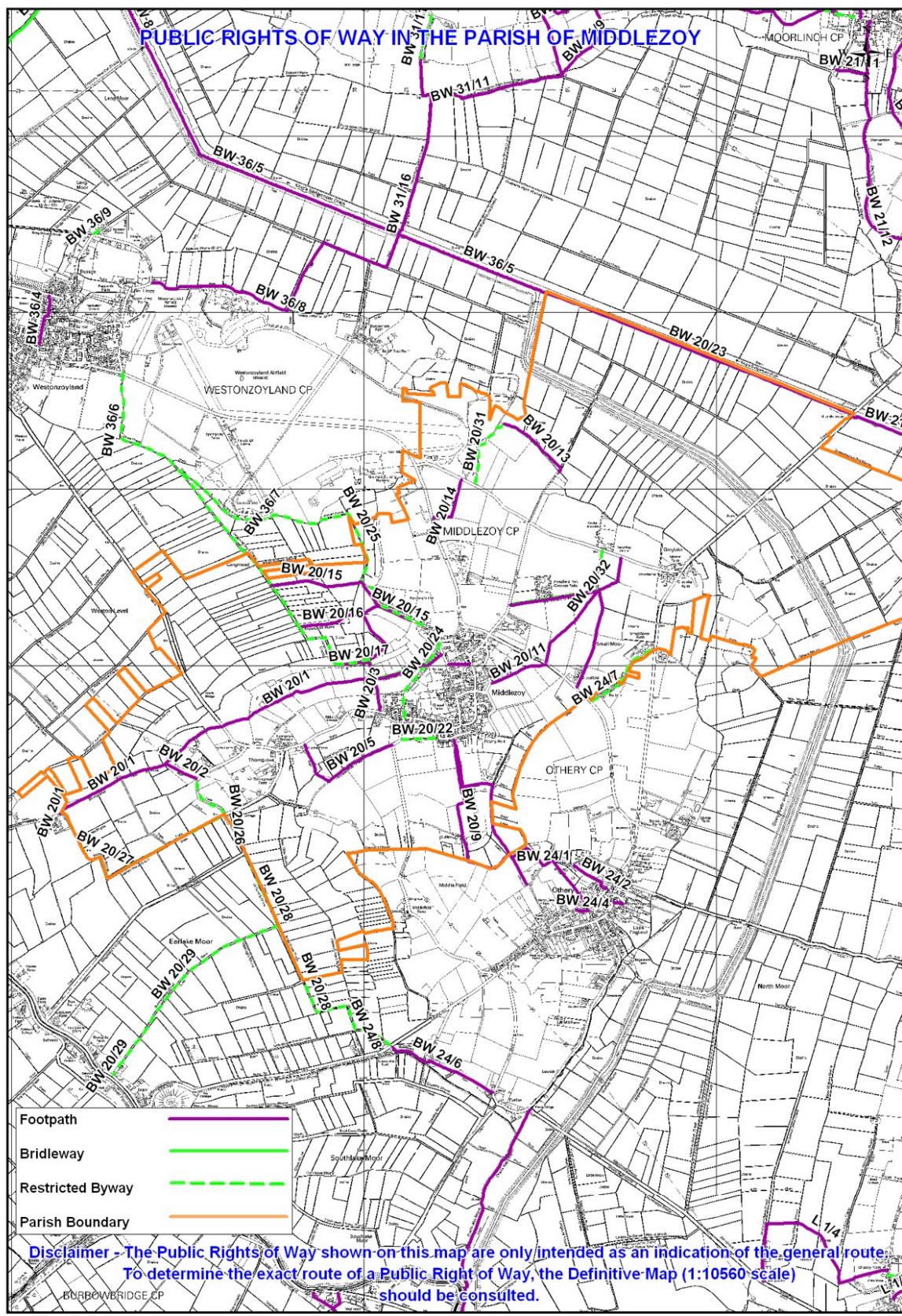


# **Middlezoy Heritage Group :**

## **Middlezoy Public Rights of Way / PRow : then and now,**

### **how these link us to the past.**

**Map 1 : The parish of Middlezoy's Public Rights of Way.**





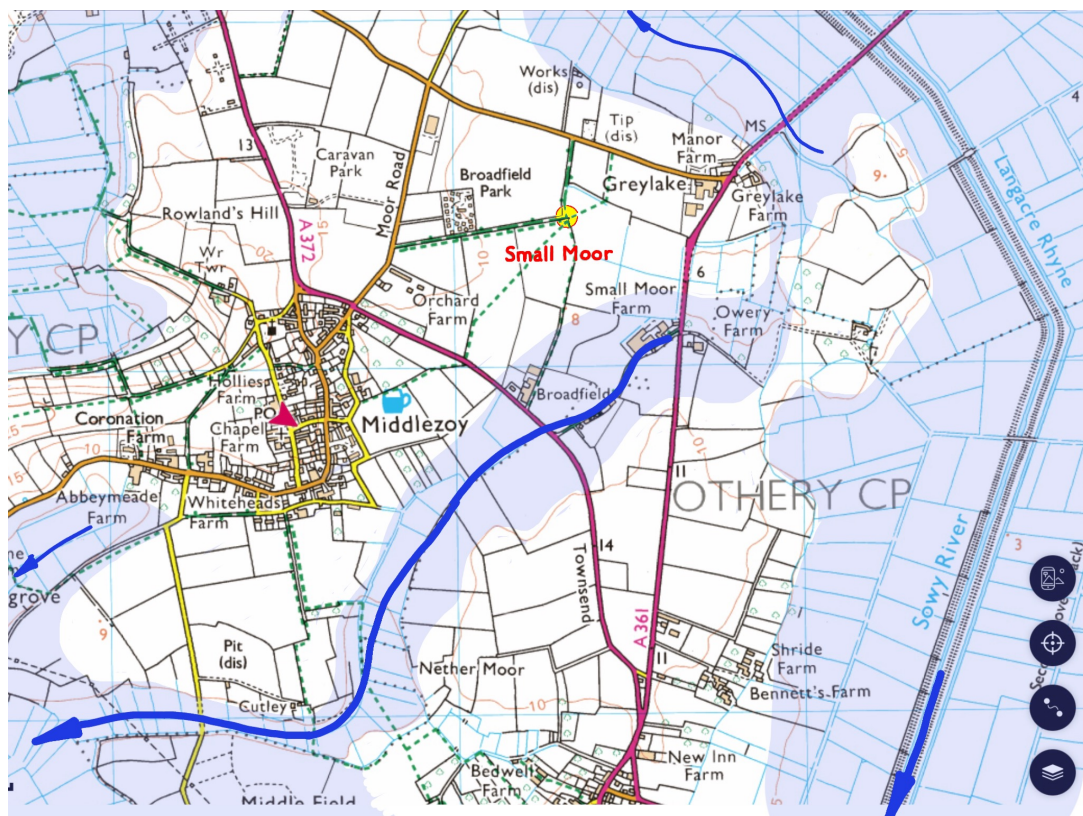
At the time Local parish councils were required to record the footpaths in their parish, paths that were deemed as essential routes that should be available and open for public use. Inevitably some paths were not recorded ; there were a number of reasons for this :- overburdened parish councillors not being able to complete the task thoroughly, possibly accepting advice from some landowners that a path was no longer in use etc.. The Definitive Map is the only legal document establishing a RoW. Although OS maps base their footpaths on the Definitive Map they are not always accurate ( see local example below ).

### Stories connected to Small Moor

Between Middlezoy and Greylake is Small Moor.

The meandering drove ( a PRoW Bridleway ), from Small Moor Farm on the A361 to the A372, follows the parish boundary separating Middlezoy and Othery, and traces the course of the river that once ran from here SW towards Nethermoor and Cutley Farm ( marked with a blue line ). It

effectively formed a natural low lying barrier between Middlezoy and Othery. These lower lying areas are coloured blue on map 3.



### Map 3.

On Small Moor ( red on map ) there exists a record of an unsolved crime in the area during the Middle Ages.

Somerset County Court rolls, dated 12 July 1317, record that the body of Richard Tok of Moorlinch was found in smalemoredych ( Small Moor Ditch ), by John Frend of Middlezoy. The unknown stranger killed him in a field at Othery but removed the body to hide it on Small Moor. “The unknown stranger immediately fled and nothing has been discovered of his name or his chattels. The sheriff is ordered to make a more thorough investigation ...”. It is not known whether the perpetrator was ever caught [ note : ....nor whether he was known but his identity not revealed. Surely someone witnessed the crime and the moving of the body ? We shall never know ! ]

It is possible that the ditch in the account drained part of Small Moor into this river, or maybe its location is the meandering Small Moor Drove.

### Straight and meandering RoW

On the Levels as land was drained and reclaimed during the Middle Ages it was simple and straightforward for routeways to follow a course alongside



the newly formed fields, so as fields were usually rectangular these highways of the time had many straight sections with sharp bends.

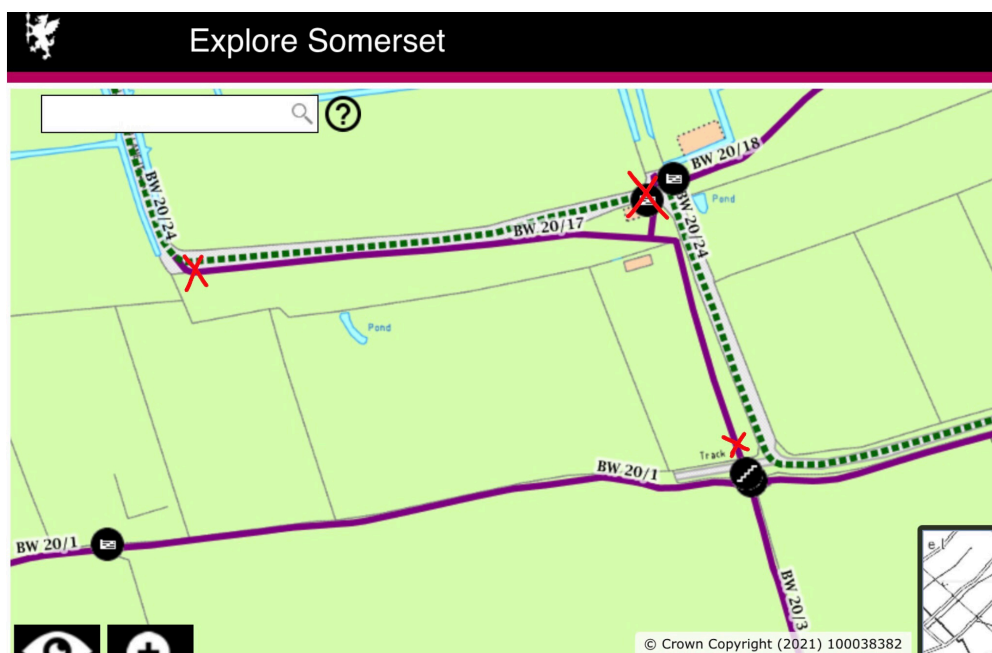
Where natural drainage was not interfered with and allowed to continue to drain the land then rivers and streams meandered across the landscape. These low lying areas are coloured blue on Map 3. River banks often made ideal routeways, and on the Levels where existing highways and footpaths meander this strongly suggests that they trace an earlier river course.

Examples are :- 1) here at Small Moor, 2) a RoW that follows the dry ditch/ rhyne from ( Sedge ) Moor Road to the site, at the SE end of Westonzoyland Airfield, at Langacre Farm, and, 3) what is known locally as Seven Bends / the A372 between Othery and Aller, properly called Beer Wall. Even this name is a clue to this being, at one time, the edge of land reclamation. It traces the Cary River of olden times.

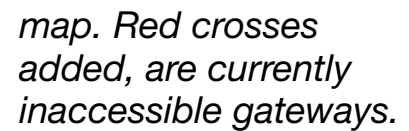
On Small Moor a surprising number of RoW meet at one point ( red ringed yellow spot on map ), and whether this has no significance or not, it is interesting to ponder and wonder how important both Small Moor and the footpaths leading to Sedge Moor were in the past. There are two parallel RoW, Little Elm Road, a drove / Bridle Way that runs along the south boundary of Broadfield Park, and inside the field that forms the southern side of the Road / drove, is a footpath.

In this area this arrangement is not unusual and maybe a distinctive feature. I have found no references to double-RoW elsewhere.

Local examples are :- Langmead Drove, just east of the Church, down to the Levels ; Knowleyards Road along Rowlands Hill ; the RoW from Southam Road ( today Holloway Road ) south of Abbeymeade Farm to Home Farm.



**Map 4 :** This map is part of Langmead Drove where it bends in two dog-legs descending down onto the moor of Langmead. On the 1887 map it is named Langmead Lane and becomes the Drove upon reaching the moors. Map 4 is the online ROAM Somerset map, and Map 5 from the 25" OS 1887



*In effect the footpath today is not accessible and so is a new lost path. An issue that has been reported. It is linked to the following section.*

## 'Lost' footpaths

There is a legal principle "Once a highway, always a highway". All public rights of way are highways, so that once a right of way exists it remains in existence unless and until it is lawfully closed or diverted.

But just because a path is not on that map does not mean that it is not a public path, as the rights may not have been recorded. The Countryside Agency estimated that over 10% of public paths were not yet listed on the

definitive map. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provides that paths that are not recorded on the definitive map by 2026 and that were in use prior to 1949 will automatically be deemed stopped-up on 1 January 2026 (there have been questions by MP's in the

House of Commons requesting that because of the delay in enacting the

legislation and the disruption caused by Covid-19 this date should be pushed forward ).

By the deadline of 1 January 2026 all historic, locally lost paths must be identified and registered for inclusion on official maps. Possible 'lost' paths in the parish are marked purple on map 6. Whether or not there is sufficient archive evidence to support this suggestion is problematic. Old OS maps are the first to go to source to find such paths. ( *NOTE* : Sadly there are a number of currently existing registered RoW in our parish that are not accessible because of obstructions compounded by their apparent 'low level importance'. These are shown with green dots on the map. ).

Rights of Way are important to accessing our countryside. Each RoW Warden has a large area and many hundreds of miles of RoW to oversee in about 48 parishes. They rely on volunteer Parish Footpath Liaison Officers and members of the public to report issues ( on the interactive ROAM Somerset online map ) and help to keep paths open and safe to enjoy. Please report any footpath issue that you may come across.

Richard Horsham Middlezoy voluntary Footpath Liaison Officer.