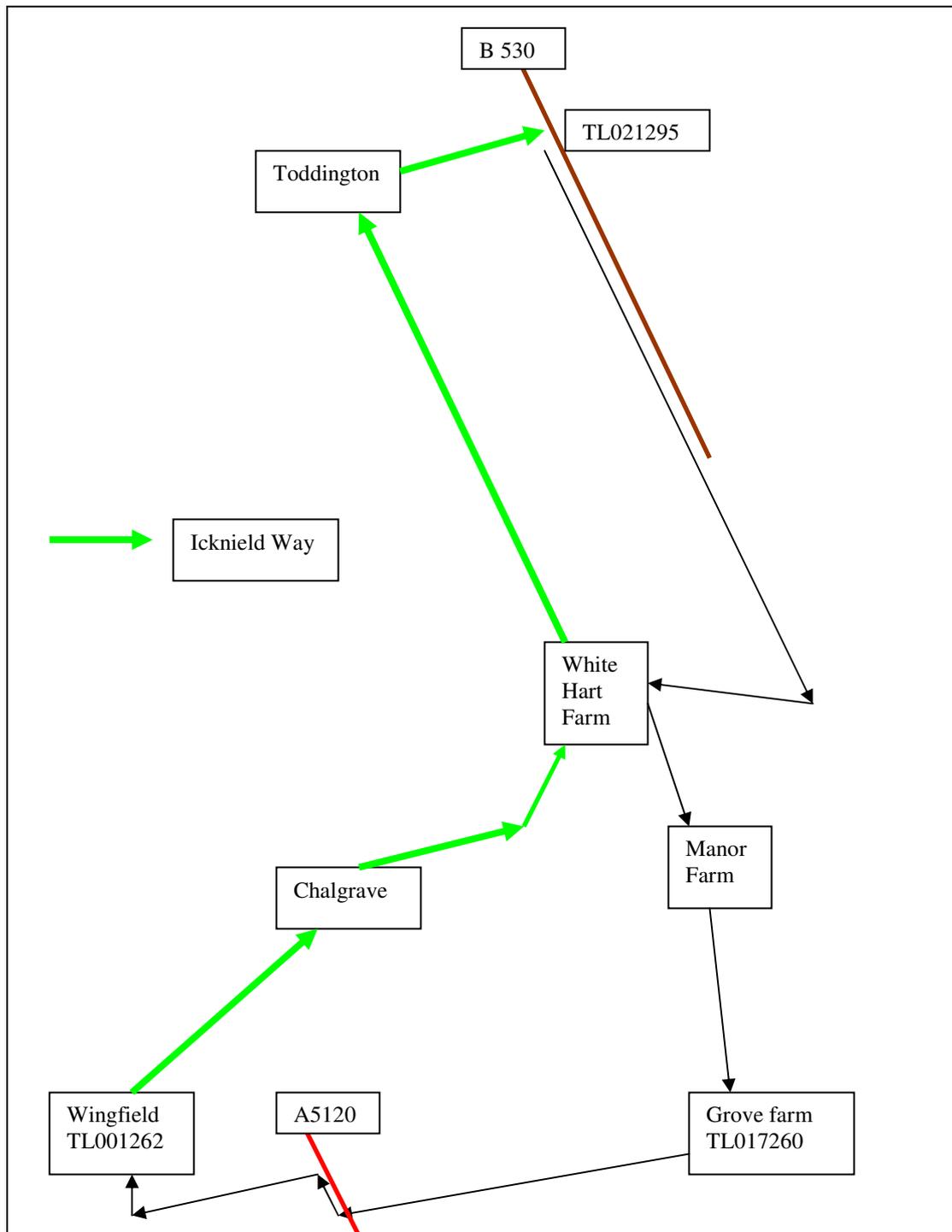


The Icknield Way. Part 4 from Wingfield to the B530 (TL021295). 14 February 2010

Map OS Explorer 193. This section continues along the Way from Wingfield village up to Toddington and then continues to meet the return route down the B530 and through ancient and modern farm land to return to Wingfield. Distance 12 km.



A continuation of the Way's scenic route, this section continues N to Toddington and beyond. The last part of Part 3 was particularly dire and that, combined with the lack

of parking sites on Thorn Road, meant that this section started in Wingfield village and took in a remaining section to the S on the return leg.

From Wingfield the 5 kg-boot problem continued with sodden ploughed (and winter-wheat planted) fields under sullen steel-grey skies. But this soon changed and the route takes in Chalgrave Church¹. Mentioned in the Domesday book and home to fine mediaeval paintings, it was associated with a 12th Century manor house which, with its attendant earthworks, was levelled in the 1970s. (The barbarities that we perpetrated on our heritage! – and of course still do today.) Heavily restored in 1931, after the tower collapsed in 1889, the church now sits in its horse chestnut ringed yard and is home to raucous rooks. With luck the *Aesculus* trees will have escaped the bleeding canker disease (caused by the *Pseudomonas* bacterium) but it's doubtful, as the disease is widespread in these parts.

The Way now descends to the B579 and to a series of delightful fields still with their selians and headland butts of the mediaeval ridge and furrow readily visible. The Way makes a bee-line for Toddington church through this ancient landscape.

At this time of year the countryside is waiting for the warmth of spring to nudge it into frenetic activity, but some of our evergreen plants (mosses and liverworts) along with the symbiotic lichens mentioned last week, are to be seen in their glory.



Chalgrave church



Rooks wait to return to the *Aesculus*



Feather moss (*Eurhynchium* spp.)



Mediaeval selians



Wall moss (*Tortula* spp.)with spore capsules



Liverwort (*Anthocerus* spp.)

The damp woodlands and the Toddington churchyard are good places to see mosses and damp corners will reveal liverworts. These plants can all propagate vegetatively but they also have a spectacular sex life with spermatozoids (produced by *antheridia*) swimming in mucilage and moisture to reach the female *archegonia*.

¹ <http://chalgrave.bedsparishes.gov.uk/other-parish-organizations/chalgrave-church/>

Next is Conger Hill motte, well protected by its circular fence, as the way moves on through farm land to fine views westwards towards Sharpenhoe Clappers. (And, incidentally, an empty bag where lunch should have been.) Down now (stomachs rumbling) to the B530 where partridges that have escaped the seasonal fowling pieces still buzz about in their coveys. We regain Manor Farm and take in the mediaeval fish ponds – well protected from prying eyes by overly frisky horses intent on pinning the unwary walker to the paddock fence – before moving on to Grove Farm. At the farm the home fields are covered with over-wintering redwings and fieldfares. And so to the A5120 and back to Wingfield along a stretch of the way that had escaped us last week.



Sharpenhoe Clappers



Conger Hill motte



Manor farm fish pond