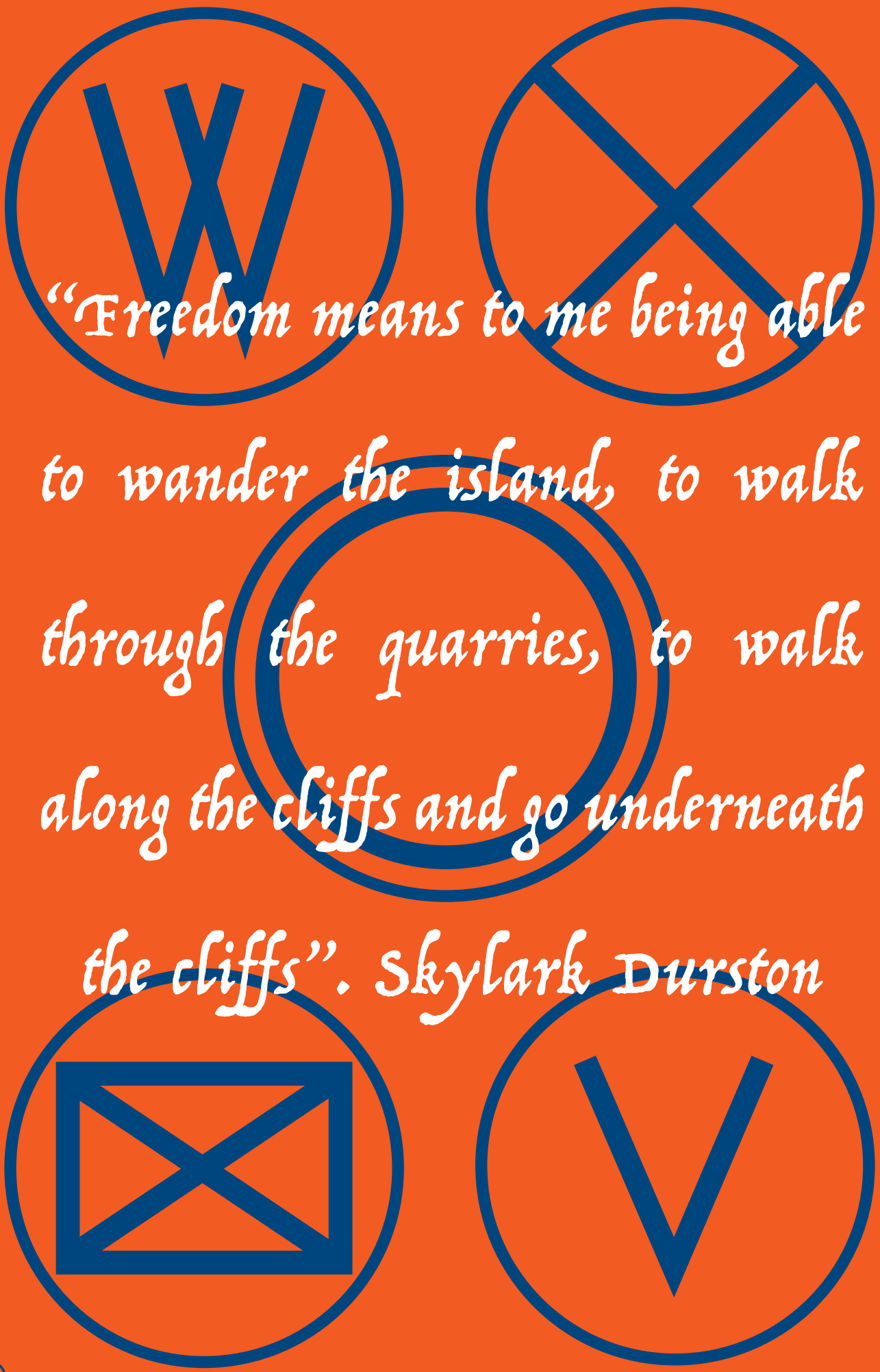


PORTLAND PATHWAYS PROJECT

b-side

Many of the footpaths and bridleways we use today have their origins in routes travelled hundreds or thousands of years ago – these routes are now enshrined in our public rights of way. They not only record how we have navigated our landscape in the past, telling stories of our landscape and built environment but also provide public access to landscapes and historic sites which otherwise may not be possible.

THE STORY OF PORTLANDS PATHWAYS

Pathways evolve over time, their courses constantly evolving and responding to changing needs and priorities. Linking places such as homes and workplaces they were originally created by the act of walking, their meandering routes responding to terrain, territory, and obstacles on route.

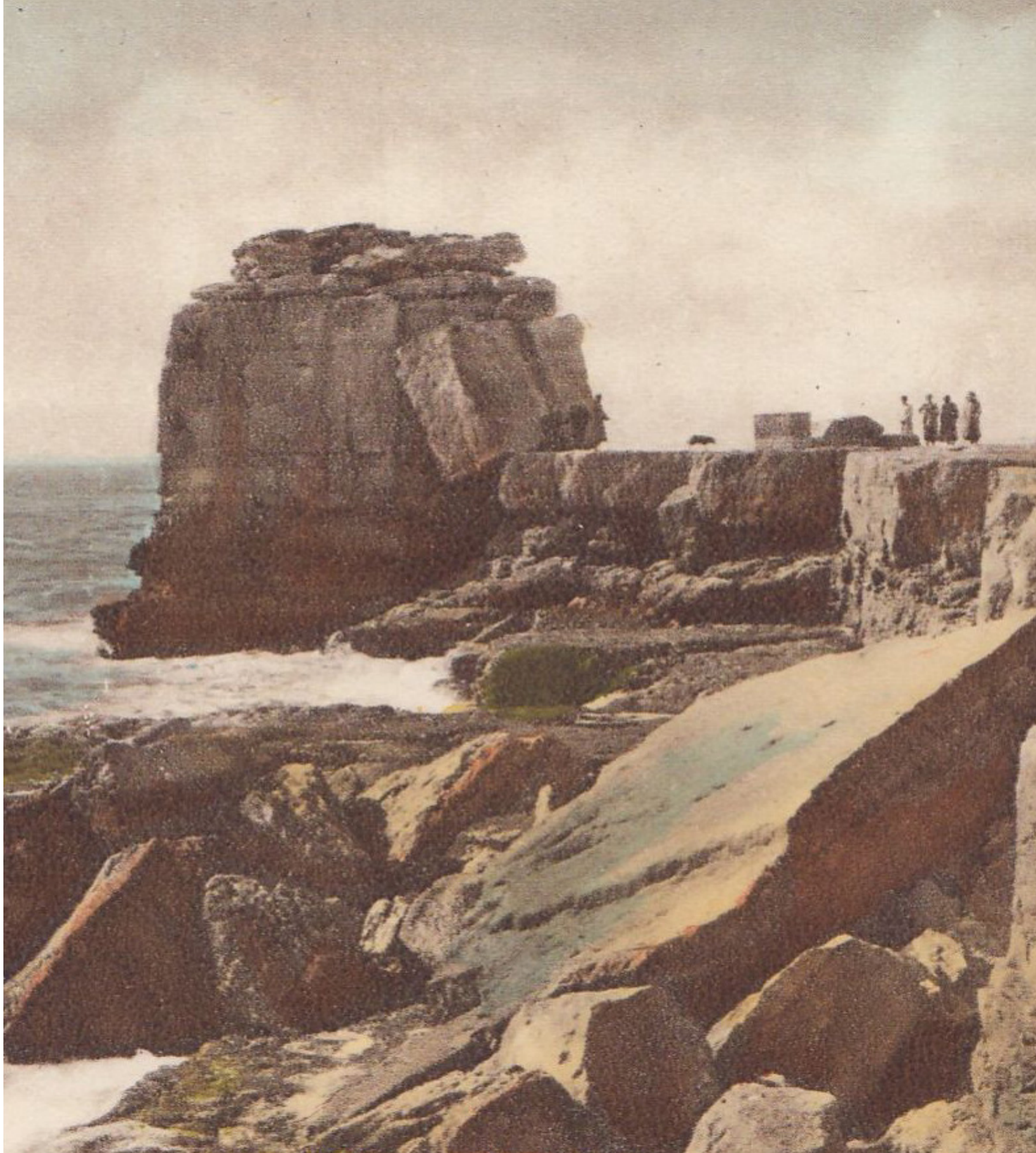
There is evidence of habitation on Portland from the earliest times with finds dating from the late Palaeolithic period, and significantly, the discovery of a Mesolithic settlement site close to the sea near Portland Bill. The occupants here were semi-sedentary, and survived by gathering molluscs and used Chert, a form of flint, collected from exposures in the cliffs for their stone tools. These archaeological finds build a picture of the importance of access to the coast for these Mesolithic islanders, and point to the probable use of pathways down to, and around the coast of Portland and the daily ritual of collecting fresh water from the nearby spring at Culver Well.

From the mid-1st to the 4th century AD, there is significant evidence of Roman settlements on Portland, with various burial sites and stone sarcophagi dating from that period found across the Island. It is during this period that many of the present day villages were originally established, including Fortuneswell, Chiswell and Castletown, Easton, Weston and Southwell. All sited close to sources of water. The pathways, which evolved connecting these settlements, remained largely unchanged up until the 19th Century due to the topography of the island.

Portland was once an agricultural landscape with fields of crops and grazing sheep. In Saxon times the land was divided into six large open fields. These fields were split into broad strips called ‘furlongs ‘and then sub divided into narrower strip fields of an acre. Each of these acres was known as a ‘lawn’, and the earth baulks that separated them were known as ‘lynchets’, or ‘lawnsheds’. This intricate system of lawnsheds led to an equally complex network of pathways and tracks, involving generations of unofficial agreements and arrangements between neighbours and relatives for access to each other’s land. **01**

In addition to the fields were large areas of common land, mainly the slopes of the Weares and Verne Hill, much of it used for sheep grazing. The Sturt (near Portland Bill) and the area around Southwell were also particularly important areas for sheep rearing. Flocks were shepherded to these common grazing lands on a daily basis and routes, wide enough for herding animals, became established on the areas of common land between the villages. The wide streets of the Tophill area of Portland reflect the need to move animals between areas of grassland and to the large ponds that were once significant features of Weston, Easton and Southwell. **02**

Portland’s agricultural land was enclosed much later in the 19th Century compared to the rest of Dorset. Nevertheless Enclosure Acts meant the system of open fields and common lands profoundly changed. Pathways were officially delineated and previously informal tracks were formalised into walled lanes as the land either side was enclosed. This network of tracks and pathways used for walking, animals and wheeled transport eventually evolved into the present road system and network of footpaths we use today. **03**



SHEEP

The importance of sheep farming is evident from local place names such as Sheepcroft, Shepherds Croft, Mutton Cove, Wool lane, Wool Meadow and the pathway known as Shepherd's Dinner. At its peak in 1840 there were four flocks of 1,000 sheep each, which roamed Portland. The increase in quarrying on the island saw their decline with the final flock leaving Portland in 1920.

THE COURT LEET

Originally a Saxon authority the Court Leet still exists on Portland today. The Court Leet manages the common land on Portland and at one time monitored the use of land, making sure that individuals stuck to the rules - dealing with issues of wandering sheep and challenging any attempts to enclose land or harvest at the wrong time.

There were various offices of the Court Leet, one being the Reeve. It was the job of the Reeve to collect a quit rent of 3d per acre on behalf of the Crown. The ownership of land was recorded on a Reeve Staff, a wooden pole marked with notches for each acre owned. Different areas of the island were depicted with different symbols **04**

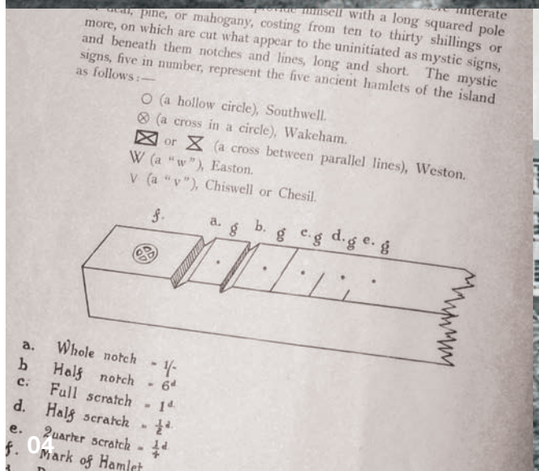
02

02

03

PONDS

The settlements of Portland evolved around small watercourses, which fed into ponds. The villages of Easton, Weston and Southwell had large ponds used for communal watering and washing. As Portland's water supply became inadequate to serve a growing population, water was piped from the mainland and the ponds filled in and incorporated into the road system.



more, on which are cut what appear to the uninitiated as mystic signs, and beneath them notches and lines, long and short. The mystic signs, five in number, represent the five ancient hamlets of the island as follows:—

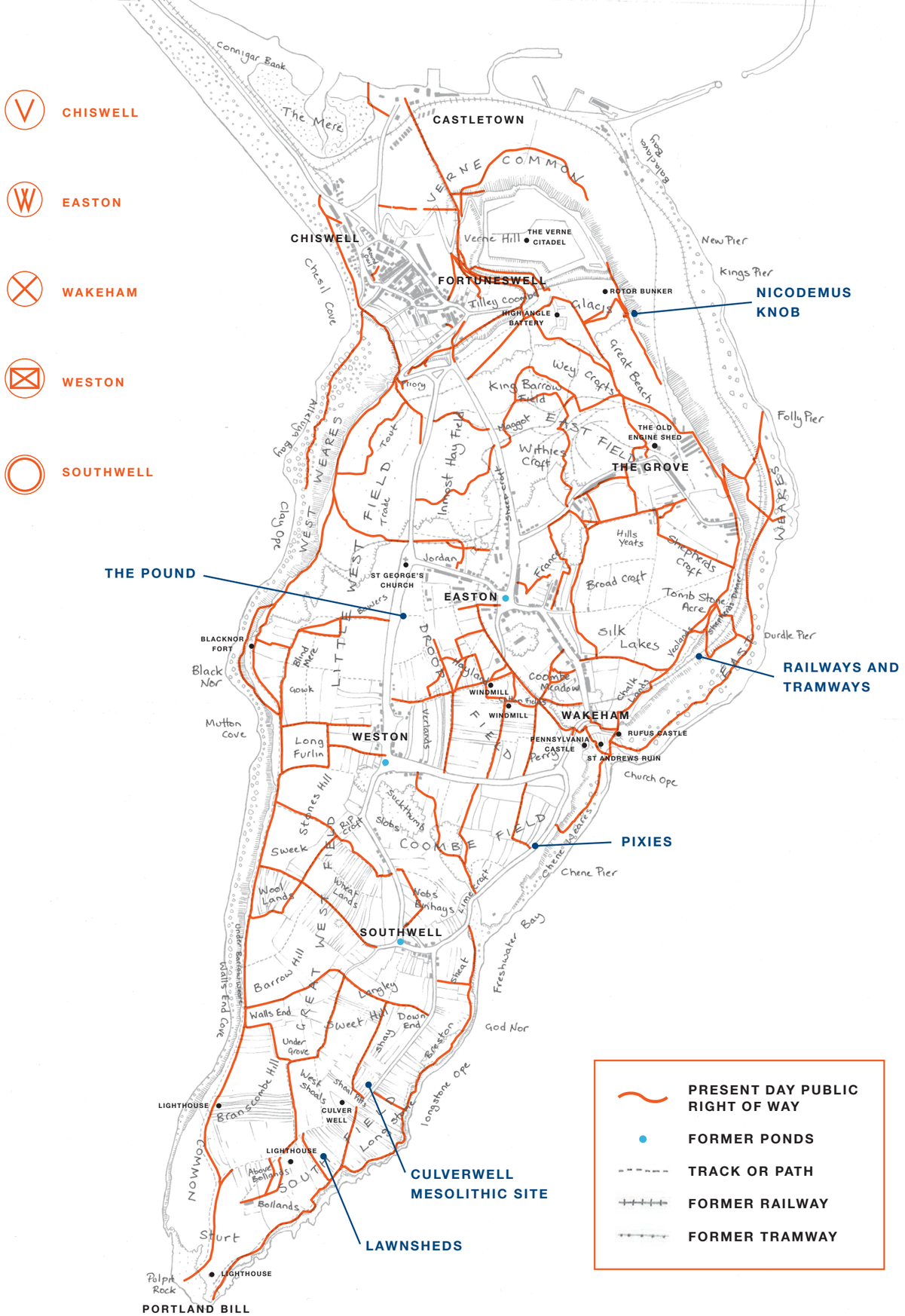
○ (a hollow circle), Southwell.
⊗ (a cross in a circle), Wakeham.
⊠ or ⧖ (a cross between parallel lines), Weston.
W (a "w"), Easton.
V (a "v"), Chiswell or Chesil.

f. a. g b. g c. g d. g e. g

a. Whole notch = 1/-
b Half notch = 6d
c. Full scratch = 1d
d. Half scratch = ½d
e. Quarter scratch = ¼d
f. Mark of Hamlet

04

02



This map shows present day rights of way overlaid on a base map indicating roads, pathways and former rail and tramways as recorded on 1888 map of Portland. Field patterns and names are based on research by Stuart Morris, sourced from old maps and other documents.

TOPHILL AND UNDERHILL

The topography of Portland has determined much of its development. The extremely steep hill between the lower clay slopes of the northern end and the high limestone plateau created a natural divide that impacted on social and practical aspects of living and working on the Island. The lower villages are collectively referred to as Underhill and those on top as Tophill.

THE POUND

On the wide verge at Weston is a walled enclosure in which sheep and cattle found unlawfully grazing on common land would be impounded by the Court Leet. It was dismantled and reconstructed on the current site in 1946 to make way for Pound Piece housing estate.

PIXIES

There are many Portland stories of fairies or “pexies” racing along the lawnsheds looking for places to hold their revels. The wall running along the road to Chene is said to be one of their haunts.

CULVERWELL MESOLITHIC SITE

Dating from 7500-8500 years ago, the main feature of this site is a large floor of limestone slabs laid on top of a rubbish dump of shells - the first known evidence in England for the use of Portland stone for building purposes. The site is open to the public on certain dates. For details see portlandarchaeology.weebly.com

NICODEMUS KNOB

Stone stack indicating former ground level, illustrating just how much stone has been excavated.

RAILWAYS AND TRAMWAYS

The pathways we see today on the East Weares are closely related not only to the railways, but also to the original routes used to ship stone from Durdle and Folly Piers. Traces of the infrastructure for these routes can still be seen in places, particularly the Merchants Incline route from Tophill quarries down to Castletown.

LAWNSHEDS

At the Bill area can still be seen the remains of the Saxon land management system of multiple strip fields, known on Portland as lawnsheds. The lawnsheds are actually the earth baulks between the cultivated ‘lawns’, enabling access. These lawns were used to grow a range of carefully controlled crops, including wheat, potatoes, barley, oats and peas.

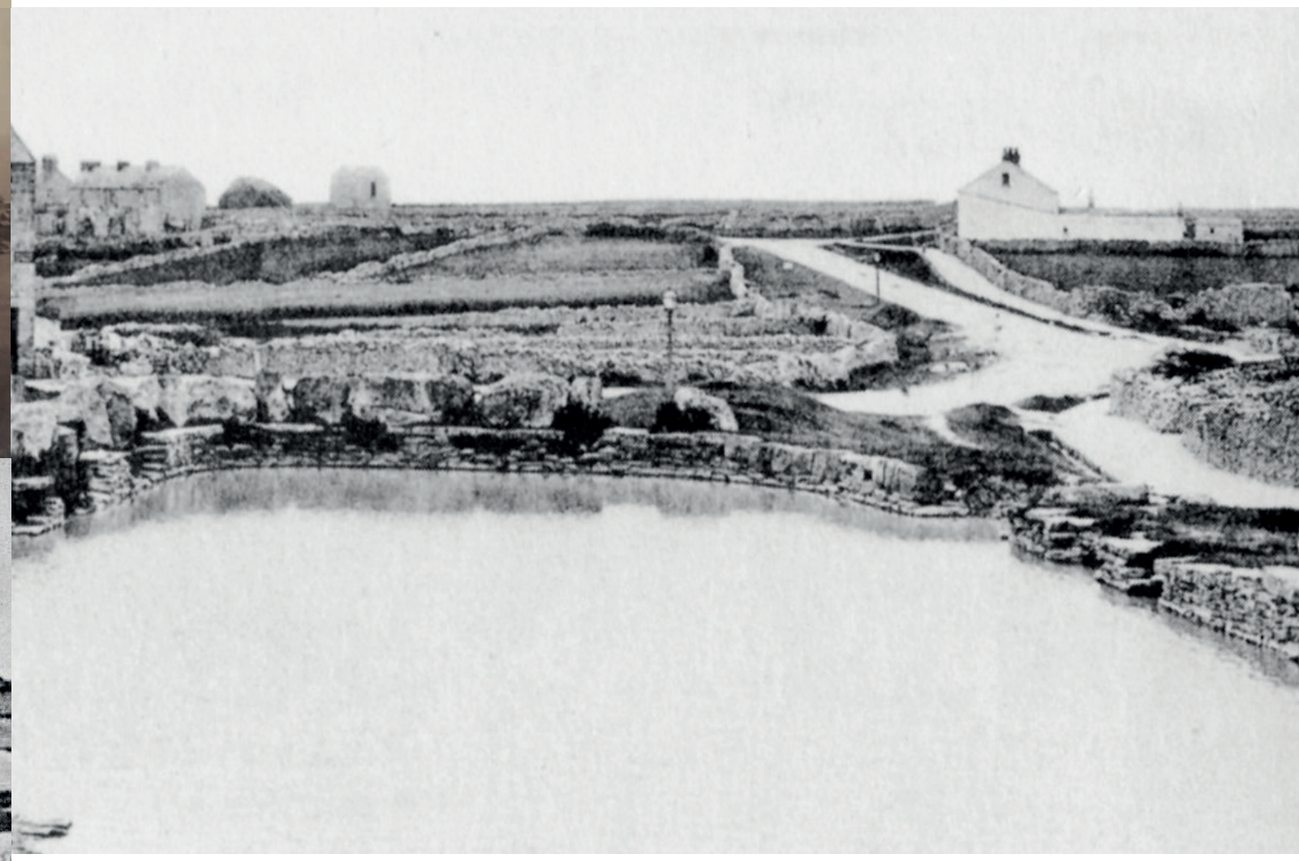
GAVELKIND

The large number of these land strips reflects the impact of the system of inheritance on Portland, known as gavelkind, which stipulated that the property of the deceased was divided equally between all children regardless of age or gender. This led to many individuals owning very small areas of land. It also meant that, unlike the mainland, women owned property in their own right and had no need to marry.

More information about the project and the history of Portland’s paths can be found in The Portland Pathways Research Report available at **b-side.org.uk**

"These landslides have ever been one of the terrors hanging over us during long spells of wet weather; for our old people can mind so many; and tell us how they carried away the roadways and piers; till, some day, maybe all Portland will slide into the sea - unless the Day of Doom should come first." Elizabeth Pearce, 1800

05



06 © Stuart Morris

07

WINDMILLS

The ruins of two medieval Windmills still stand today to the south of Easton, on what was originally known as 'Haylands' or 'Droopfield'. The windmills themselves probably ceased to operate around the 1890s, due to cheap mass produced flour and bread being readily available via the Island's modern rail and road links to Weymouth. However the fields around them continued to be harvested up until the 1970s. The mills have increasingly fallen into disrepair - the timber components of the windshaft and sailstock can be seen in Portland Museum. **05**

YEAT STONES

As the islands lands were gradually enclosed many of the common grazing meadows were fitted with 'yeat' stones. These were slotted stone posts fitted with removable wooden bars designed to contain animals but also allow access when needed. Eventually replaced by standard walls and gates, many of these yeat stones can still be found today, marking the edges of Portland's pathways.

LOST PATHS & NEW PATHS

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the scale of quarrying transformed the natural landscape of Portland. Initially stone was quarried near to the cliff tops on the East and West Weares, for ease of access to load the stone onto barges and transport by sea. However, in 1824 virgin fields near Easton were opened up, marking the beginning of inland quarrying, that continues to this day. This rapid increase in quarrying transformed the agricultural system on the Island as land became more profitable to quarry than to farm. This had a significant impact on the pathways and rights of way on Portland, with pathways between the lawns being lost, and led to the rapid disconnection of routes that had been walked for centuries.

"The trouble is, you see, when they take the footpaths, it's not just them they take. There's things like Bee Orchids, Spider Orchids, and up there (by the Windmills) was the only place where the wild anemone grew."
Neville Warbridge

However quarrying also opened up new paths. By fundamentally altering patterns and places of work, new routes were created for workers to access the quarries. The continuing development of the quarrying industry also resulted in the construction of railways and tramways for moving stone, extending new routes into the landscape. Although these railways eventually closed and tracks were dismantled, the rail beds themselves remained. Many of these routes cut into the stone are now used as new pathways for walking. New paths have also been established in the disused quarries as these have gradually been reclaimed by nature. **06**

The railways, along with the first bridge across to Portland from the mainland built in 1839, meant Portland became more accessible and began to attract new visitors. The picturesque views and walks around Pennsylvania Castle and the romantic ruins of Rufus Castle and St Andrews Church at Church Ope and even the convicts working in the quarries were promoted as attractions. **07**

For Portlanders themselves, pathways were always part of the recreations and communal ceremonies of Portland life - used for processions, fairs and general socialising. The open land and freedom to roam is expressed in many reminiscences. A particularly important pastime was the seasonal foraging for blackberries, apples, sloes and flowers, from particular bushes and trees along the pathways. The edges of footpaths continue to offer important wildlife habitats.

PATHS TODAY

Once shared spaces, paths are now distinctly separated into routes for motorised vehicles and those for pedestrians – our current network of footpaths. Portland's pathways continue to have a very important place in the memories and mythologies of Portland's history. Whilst quarrying once presented the biggest threat it is present day encroachment of building developments, erosion and neglect that challenges the continuation of the routes of the past. Recent landfalls at West Weares have led to cliff paths being redirected. Redirection also occurs when a right of way crosses the path of building development. Whilst some form of access is usually retained this often changes the route and thus its connection to its origins.

Unused paths become overgrown and subsequently impassable and eventually forgotten. Walking the paths keeps this rich pattern of tracks covering Portland accessible. Whilst the local authority has a responsibility to maintain rights of way this only extends to those paths on the definitive map. There is currently a cut off date of 2026, by which any paths which came into existence before 1949 and are not currently on the official map need to be registered to safeguard access.

Our pathways are valued for many reasons both practical and emotional, connecting us to places and past histories as well as being a huge leisure resource. They are assets we often take for granted but would be much missed if they were lost.

"The fields have since gone near the homes we once knew
The walks we had used are now getting so few.
Such old scenes have vanished from our aged gaze
Replaced in this day by the new buildings maze".
George Davy

The last harvest at Haylands in 1968 - now a housing estate. © Stuart Morris

THE PORTLAND PATHWAYS PROJECT

This document has been compiled for the Portland Pathways Project 2018. The project brought together a group of local residents to research the histories of the footpaths and rights of way across the Isle of Portland. This research has inspired an exhibition, this publication and a series of artist led guided walks to share this knowledge and encourage visitors and residents to explore Portland on foot.

Project developed and managed by b-side.

Research coordinated by Bea Moyes.

Publication developed for b-side by Amanda Wallwork and Bea Moyes and designed by Spike Golding.

Guided walks devised and led by artist Ania Bas.

Portland Pathways Research Group: Sheila Ryan, Doug Stem, Chloe Taylor, Kit and David Johnson, Andrea Franken-Hughes, Elizabeth Hardy, Susan Frazer, Chris Burton, Andy McLaughlin, Fiona Taylor, Nikki Fryer, Kathy O'borne, Deborah Read, Sharon Philips, Charles Cowling and Julie Matthews.

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A special thank you to Stuart Morris for permission to use many of his images and place name research. For further reading see Stuarts book: Portland, an Illustrated History (2016 Edition). ISBN 978-0-9955462-0-2

For further information and sources please refer to the Portland Pathways Research Report available at

www.b-side.org.uk

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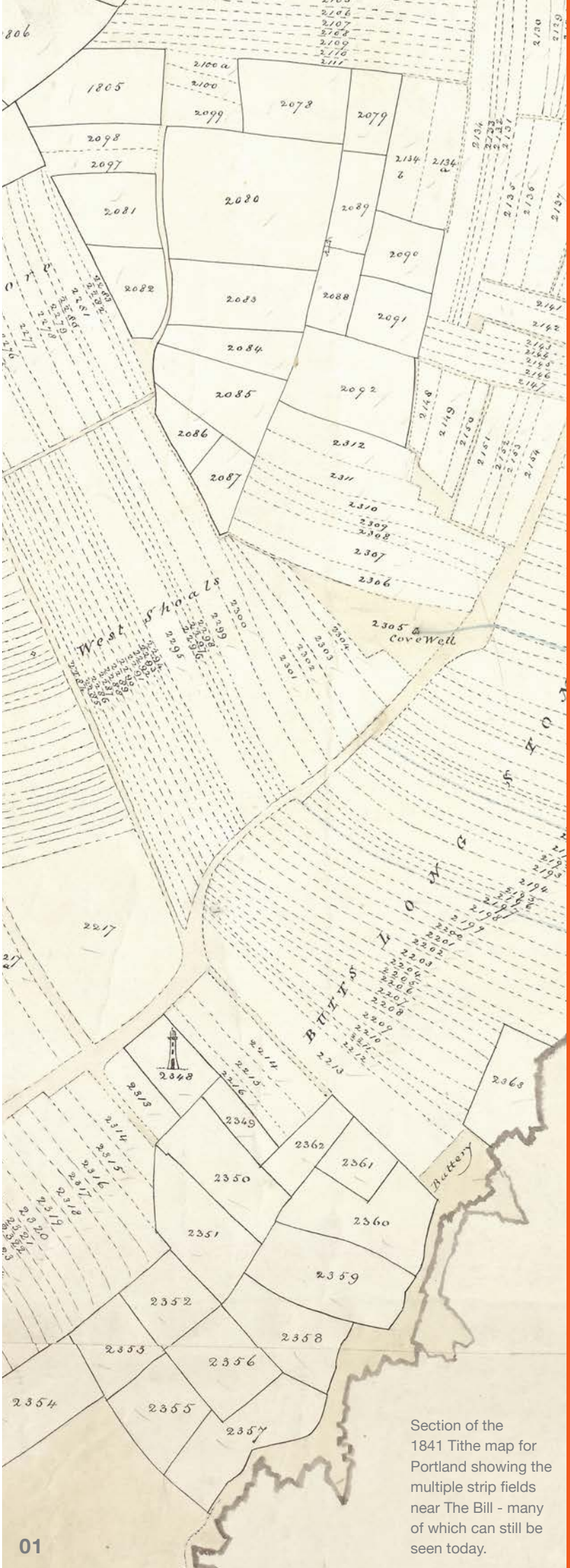

Section of the 1841 Tithe map for Portland showing the multiple strip fields near The Bill - many of which can still be seen today.

More information about the history of Portland's paths can be found in The Portland Pathways Research Report available at b-side.org.uk