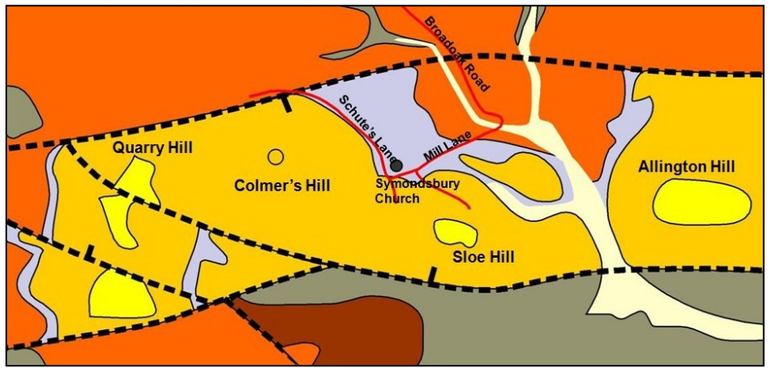
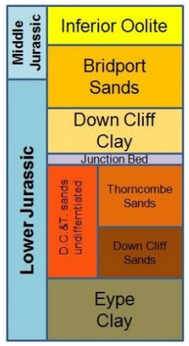
Symondsbury sunken lanes

Preserving Our Geological Heritage

Three rock exposures which are designated as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) are to be found along the sides of sunken lanes in the vicinity of the village of Symondsbury, near Bridport. The lanes, locally called 'holloways' cut through the different sands of the Middle and Upper Lias, and the Junction Bed limestone.

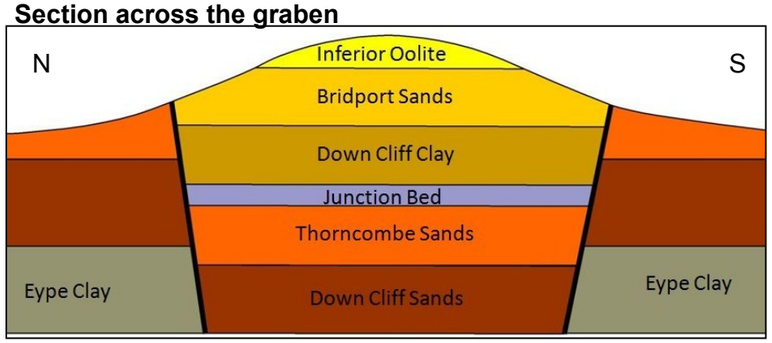
Surface geology showing east/west trending faults





Two east-west trending faults between Quarry Hill and Bridport have allowed a huge block of rocks to subside leaving Symondsbury village in the downslip part of the graben. The southern fault runs south of Symondsbury across the southern face of Quarry Hill, near Chideock and roughly on the line of the A35 road. The fault to the north crosses Shute's Lane and Broadoak Road, both sunken lanes.

Section across the graben



Site 1 Shute's Lane (SY443 937 and north-west to SY434 938)

The lane follows the dip slope of the rock. Blocks of Junction Bed limestone (also called the Down Cliff Limestone) can be seen along the sides at about knee height. They disappear as the ground rises so that, near the brow of the hill only the Down Cliff Clay above is visible.

As the slope levels out and the steep sides disappear, there is a view through the hedge to the south towards Colmer's Hill *(left)*. This distinctive conical hill originally had a capping of Inferior Oolite, like Allington, Sloe and Quarry Hills have, but only the Bridport Sands above the Down Cliff Clay remain.

On the right hand side of the lane the fields fall away into a gully cut into the soft sandy strata, while the lane briefly follows the line of the northern fault. The walls of the lane beyond the cottage are Thorncombe Sands. They contain distinctive layers of large rounded doggers (hard concretions of calcite-cemented sand) weathering out of the sandstone.

Mill Lane (SY446 937 to SY447 937)
It is worth looking at the fossils in the walls of the buildings between the church and the R.I.G. site where ammonites, belemnites, bivalves and brachiopods can all be seen.

The R.I.G. site is a roadside exposure comprising the Junction Bed limestone above Thorncombe Sands. Characteristic lines of doggers can be seen in the sand. The limestone is pinkish in colour and fossiliferous but difficult to see but there are good examples in the wall of the nearby building.

Broad Oak Road (SY441 945 to SY444 942)
The Down Cliff Sands can be seen in the cutting below Warren Hill. They are a darker colour than the Thorncombe Sands being brown or grey laminated sands with occasional small iron rich nodules. This exposure is on the northern side of the northern fault that runs across Shute's Lane and Broad Oak road.