



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Forgotten Floodplains

Meadows Remembered

Stories from Hardwick Green and Eldersfield Marsh



HERITAGE
FUND

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**Hardwick
Green
Meadows**



Hardwick Green Meadows

When Hardwick Green Meadows came up for sale in 2015 it represented an opportunity for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to secure the long-term future of one of the UK's rarest habitats, 20 hectares of floodplain meadows.

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation initially purchased the meadows in 2015. They were then leased to Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for a period of two years in order to allow the Trust time to fundraise for their purchase. In 2018, a generous grant of £198,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund helped to achieve this target, along with significant donations from Severn Waste Services, a number of charitable trusts, Trust supporters and members of the public.

This booklet was written and compiled by volunteers involved with the Hardwick Green Meadows Project, which ran from Spring 2018 until April 2020. There were several elements to the project, the most significant being researching the area's past and capturing the memories of the people living in and around Hardwick Green. Local people have been involved and have learnt of the value of floodplain meadows, which, as we'll see, are now a very rare habitat.

Hardwick Green Meadows Photo by Wendy Carter

Wildlife

Floodplain meadows are one of the richest neutral grassland habitats in the UK.



In some remaining floodplain meadows, more than 40 different plant species can be found in one square metre, species that assemble into a now rare plant community called 'Burnet floodplain meadow plant community' after the most typical species found within it (great burnet and meadow foxtail grass). This plant community is only found in floodplains that are managed with an annual hay cut and is at its most diverse on sites that have been managed in the same way for hundreds of years.

Invertebrates

From bumblebees and beetles to hoverflies and sawflies, floodplain meadows provide habitat for invertebrates in a range of ways. They offer a significant seasonal resource of pollen and nectar for a large number of species including many that are in global decline. Floodplain meadows also offer habitat for more specialist flower-feeding insects that require particular flowering plants, either to complete their larval stages or as the main food plant for adults. Ground beetles (some of which can survive flooding for months), spiders and invertebrates such as true bugs and leafhoppers living on plant stems, leaves and roots add to the diversity.

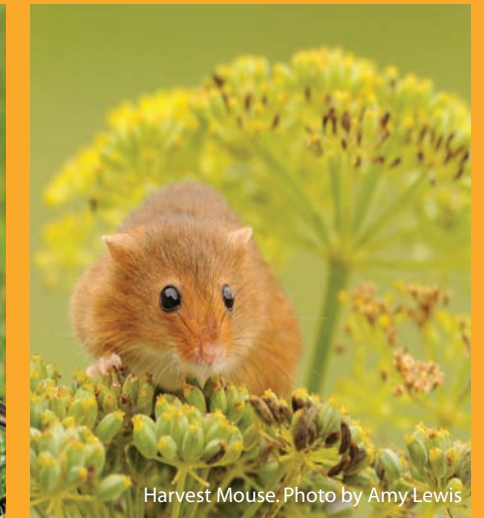
Birds

Floodplain meadows provide a rich habitat for a range of birds throughout the year. During the spring and summer, larger sites can be important for breeding waders such as lapwing, curlew, redshank, snipe and black-tailed godwit. Skylark may nest in floodplain meadows and yellow wagtail is particularly attracted to sites where cattle are grazing.

During and after flooding, floodplain meadows provide feeding grounds for wildfowl and wading birds, year-round food for small birds that rely on seeds and invertebrates, and feeding and roosting habitat for wintering species such as starling, redwing and fieldfare.



Skylark. Photo by Roger Pannell



Harvest Mouse. Photo by Amy Lewis

Mammals

Floodplain meadows provide good habitat for small mammals such as harvest mouse, field vole and common shrew.

The close proximity of rivers and their associated ditches and dykes provide a well-connected network of riparian habitats that benefit otter, water vole and water shrew. These water courses are feeding grounds for invertebrates that attract bats including Daubenton's bat, soprano pipistrelle, noctule and the rare barbastelle bat.

A Bioblitz undertaken by naturalists and the local community in June 2019 at Hardwick Green Meadows recorded 274 invertebrate, plant, grass, mammal and bird species - just a proportion of the total number of species associated with the site.

Floodplain meadows in the UK

by Emma Rothero, Floodplain Meadows Partnership Project Manager

Floodplain meadows are beautiful, ancient and fascinating places that are rich in wildlife and history.

Throughout the spring and early summer, they are awash with wildflowers and waving grasses, humming with insects and the birds that depend on them. They provide a vibrant and delightful spectacle that has now all but disappeared from the UK.

Floodplain meadows evolved over many hundreds of years through the need to store the summer grass crop as hay to sustain cattle, sheep and especially horses over the winter months. The system of allowing the vegetation to grow in spring, taking a hay crop in midsummer and then grazing the re-growth prevented taller, coarser species from becoming dominant and created the diverse flower-rich sward we see today. Once valued primarily for their key role in commercial agriculture, the few remaining species-rich floodplain meadows are now valued for wildlife, flood storage, cultural history, seasonal pollinator habitat, trapping sediments and storing carbon in their deep undisturbed soils. They provide a link with the past, a living reminder of the traditional, rural landscapes and the ways of life that created them.

Hardwick Green Meadows Photo by Wendy Carter

History

Many floodplain meadows are ancient. Archaeological evidence points to pastoral systems being in place as far back as the Bronze Age (2,500 - 800 BC) and continuing into the Iron Age (800 BC - 43 AD).

By the time of the Roman occupation of Britain (43 - 410 AD), at least some floodplain grasslands were cut for hay and haymaking was a well-established management practice in Saxon times (7th - 9th centuries). By Norman times, meadows were recorded in many settlements in the Domesday Book of 1086 and were valued more highly than arable land.

Meadows played a crucial role in the farming economy. The production of hay allowed animals to be kept over winter, while their manure fertilised the arable fields. Hay provided winter feed for the oxen and horses essential for farming practices and for the livestock reared for meat, milk, wool and leather. Floodplain meadows were particularly highly valued because the nutrient-rich silt deposited by floodwaters meant that they were very productive and the hay had a high mineral content; they were the most expensive type of land recorded in the Domesday survey.

Traditional management of floodplain meadows

The historical agricultural management of floodplain meadows involved hay cropping followed by grazing of the re-growth (known as 'aftermath'), although sometimes a double hay cut was taken in place of grazing. This system made the most effective use of the floodplain cycle. In some cases, the hay cut was shared between manorial tenants who were allocated particular strips of meadow and was then followed by communal grazing. Such a system was found across the UK from at least medieval times onwards and is still found on a handful of meadows remaining today. These are known as Lammas meadows.

Hay from floodplain meadows was highly prized and has been described as 'the equivalent of the village petrol pump and hay was the petrol' by landscape historian Stephen Warburton because of the importance of stock to the pre-industrialised economy.

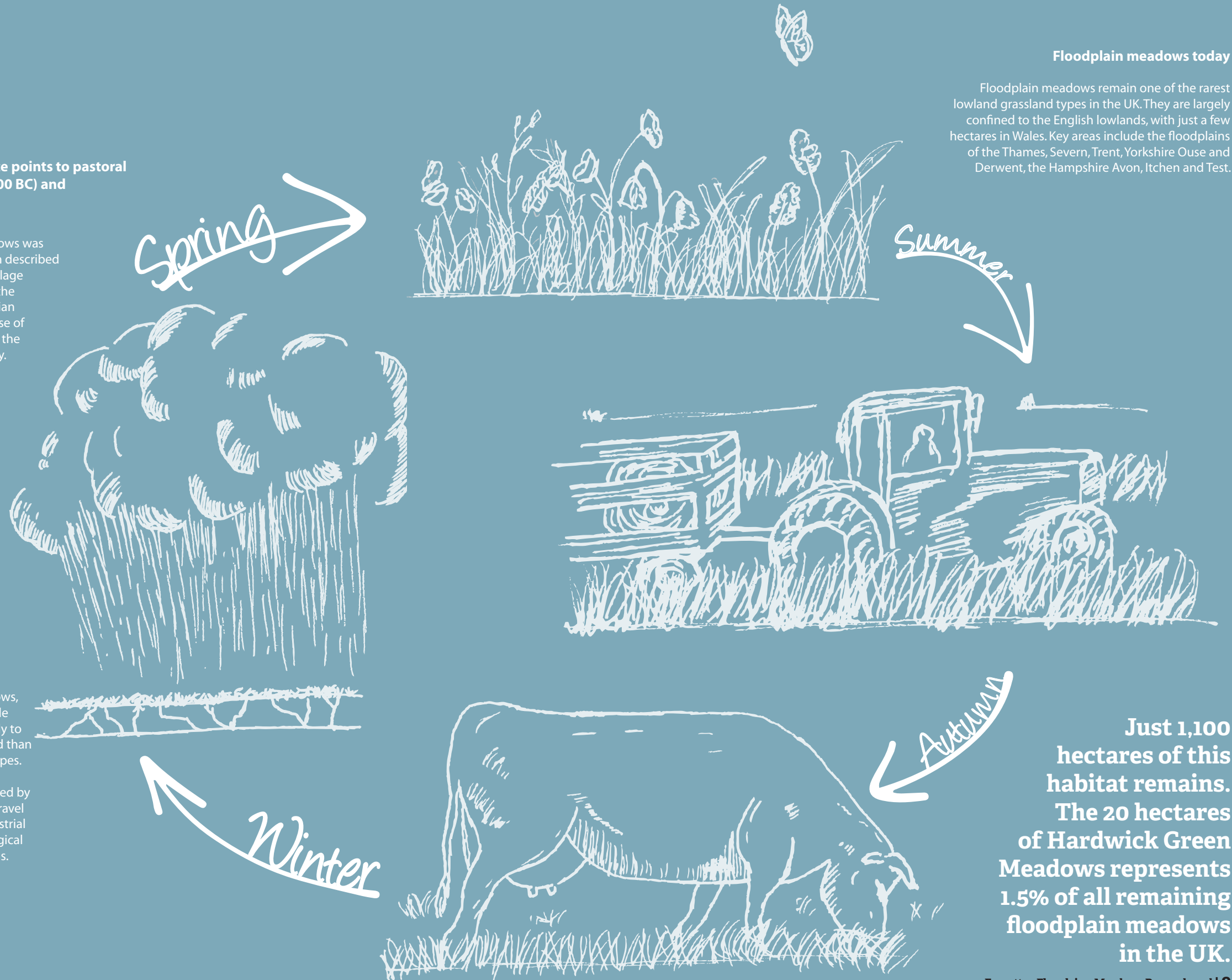
Loss

The distribution and extent of floodplain meadows in the past is not really known but they are thought to have been widespread wherever suitable substrate, topography, hydrological regime and land-use practices coincided. It is likely that by the 13th century, most floodplains were managed as meadows. However, agricultural intensification since the mid-20th century led to rapid (but unquantified) losses of floodplain meadows, whose flat terrain and fertile soils made them more likely to be agriculturally intensified than other lowland grassland types.

This decline was exacerbated by losses through sand and gravel extraction, urban and industrial development and hydrological changes to river floodplains.

Floodplain meadows today

Floodplain meadows remain one of the rarest lowland grassland types in the UK. They are largely confined to the English lowlands, with just a few hectares in Wales. Key areas include the floodplains of the Thames, Severn, Trent, Yorkshire Ouse and Derwent, the Hampshire Avon, Itchen and Test.



Just 1,100 hectares of this habitat remains. The 20 hectares of Hardwick Green Meadows represents 1.5% of all remaining floodplain meadows in the UK.

The last glaciation eroded the mudstone bedrock to form a basin. Melt from the glacier accumulated to form a shallow wetland environment dominated by sedges

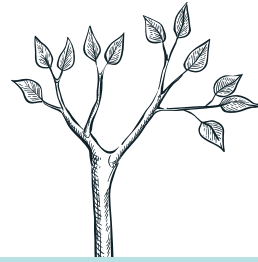


Hardwick Green Meadows by Shelly Perkins shellypekins.co.uk



800BC to 1065AD
Iron Age to early medieval

- Iron Age hillfort at Gadbury Bank looking across the River Severn valley, perhaps an administrative hub for the region.
- Iron Age and Romano - British farming landscape with settlements and animal enclosures on raised ground.
- A wetland area with marshes, sedges, rushes, alder and water meadows. Crane pools encouraged the birds for hunting.
- 1086 records Eldersfield "as being held by the king and containing five hides of land and three ploughs, 12 villains and 13 boarders with 11 ploughs, five slaves and six oxmen".
- The two leagues of woodland recorded probably formed part of a royal forest, later to become Malvern Chase.



12th to 15th century

- Increase in agricultural activity with ridge and furrow arable cultivation in 12th and 13th centuries.
- A number of isolated farmsteads with one or more yards and some with outbuildings (e.g. Marsh Court and Hardwick Court). Other buildings include timber-framed cottages and St John the Baptist Church, Eldersfield, and Pendock Church, both of which have 12th century remains.
- Decrease in population of area during 14th and 15th centuries due to poor growing conditions, plague and threat locally of war (Battle of Tewkesbury). Some agricultural land reverted back to woodland. Evidence of deserted medieval villages in locality.
- Downturn of arable farming in favour of pastoral farming.



16th to 18th century

- Further development of farmsteads (e.g. Hardwick House and Marchlands House) and several more in the surrounding area.
- 17th century thatched cottage, Walmers Cottage, in Pit's Field of Hardwick Green, amongst the many dwellings built at this time, some isolated and some within settlements. Farm buildings increased to include cider houses, stables, cowsheds and pigeon cotes.
- The Civil War and the Battle of Redmarley in 1644 responsible for local troop activity.
- Numerous farm ponds recorded in the area. May be evidence of a post-medieval water management system. Some ponds brick-lined for cart washing.
- Increased use of natural resources evident: limestone quarries, marl pits and limekilns suggest need to improve soil for increasing arable farming; woodland management and saw mills; osier (willow) beds for basket-making and other purposes.
- Hardwick Green Meadows divided into large number of unfenced strips with several owners or occupiers.



19th century

- Following enclosure Hardwick Green becomes several larger fields for more efficient farming.
- Building of Tewkesbury Lock on the Severn prevented tidal waters coming up to Worcester. Area periodically inundated with estuarine water prior to this.
- Drainage system of Marsh Brook implemented under the General Drainage Act, involving changes to the watercourses and the construction of ditches, culverts and bridges.
- Large increase in number of farmsteads and farm buildings in area.
- Technical instruction classes in veterinary science, shoeing, feeding and management of animals set up in Eldersfield.
- Rural farming landscape with small to medium-sized fields, almost equally divided between arable and pastoral with some orchards. Woodland sparse, very much decreased since medieval times.



Modern times

- Only 10 acres of woodland left within the 3,387 acres that make up Eldersfield Parish.
- Deep dredging of drainage ditches and brooks to further improve drainage of the marshes.
- Drainage system impacts significantly on biodiversity of the meadows.
- World War II radar station, RAF storage and practice area constructed north of the area.
- M50 motorway constructed 1962.
- 2018 - Worcestershire Wildlife Trust purchased the agricultural fields, Hardwick Green Meadows, with intention of restoring and maintaining the floodplain meadows and to establish greater connectivity with other conserved areas.



Kym Jackson

Charlie Jeffes

Janet Peters

Reg Roberts

Rob Allen



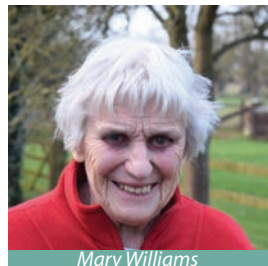
John Denham interviewing Michael Liley



Chris Greensmith



Stewart Taylor



Mary Williams



Pat and John Keighley



Ann Heywood



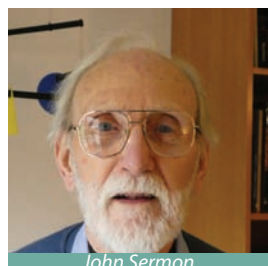
Frieda Griffiths and Val Bundy



Rex Bullock



Mary Mitchell



John Sermon



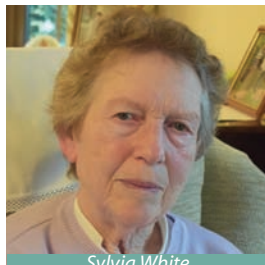
Harold Davis



John Humphreys



Beryl and Tom Jackson



Sylvia White



Dick Voyce

Oral History and Hardwick Green Meadows

When ways to spread the word about our unique floodplain meadows at Hardwick Green Meadows were first considered, our dilemma was how to encourage people to care for, value, learn about and protect this fragile habitat, without hordes of people trampling all over them.

An oral history project was the perfect answer; we could record the memories of people who had lived and worked in the area. We could talk to people who had crossed the fields on their way to school, explored the brooks, seen the floods rise and fall, cared for the stock, helped with the harvest or studied the biodiversity.

Choosing the interviewees

People recommended local residents to interview and they, in turn, passed on their own recommendations. Almost 30 people were interviewed, all of whom had a direct connection to our meadows, and whereas some had lived in the area all their lives, others had an interesting overview of the area's hydrology or archaeology, for example. I undertook the interviews, along with a team of volunteers and schoolchildren from Pendock and Eldersfield Lawn Schools. You'll find a CD at the back of the book that tells the story of the meadows from the 1930s to the present day through the voices of local people.

By the end of an hour in the company of someone who has lived in an area all their life, we realised that recording oral history is a privilege. People share precious things and recall long-ago events that they haven't thought about for years. Some interviews went off in unexpected and fascinating directions! An immense archive of social history was gathered.

The legacy of the oral history project

An intangible legacy of the oral history project was simply the act of giving value to the knowledge held in people's heads. Some of the people who were approached were very humble and didn't think they had anything interesting to say. They most definitely did! They have taught us all a great deal about the land, the landscape and their way of life.

by Julia Letts, Oral History Consultant



"I was bowled over... there was masses of great burnet, so colourful, and the white heads of water dropworts and oxeye daisies swaying in the breeze, and pepper saxifrage and buttercups. It was amazing."

Mike Liley, Worcester Wildlife Trust Grasslands Officer



"Pretty much always something to see at Hardwick. Lovely birds - yellowhammers, a kingfisher that darts about the stream, won't be long before we get the flocks of redwings and fieldfares arriving."

Chris Greensmith



Work on the farm was hard and never stopped but time was found for sport and competition between village teams was fierce. Skittles and darts were played all year round, football in winter (Pendock once fielded two teams every Saturday in the season) and cricket in summer.



Val Bundy has lived in Eldersfield for more than 50 years and was secretary of the village cricket team. Val reminisced:

In Eldersfield, The Greyhound (now The Butcher's Arms) was the home of the local team. There has been a cricket ground in Eldersfield for over a hundred years. The current one is still near the pub and its owner once promised that "as long as there's a team they will have the ground for nothing".

Val Bundy



"We had snow for months and months and I remember sledging down the banks and riding a tricycle round and round the ponds. We used to cut holes in the ice for the cattle to drink out of. Great big thick chunks of ice. Falling in. Never more than up to my waist but in the end my mother banned me from going back to the pond."

Kym and his sister Ann spent a great deal of time playing in the meadows. They tried to copy the cowboys on the TV show Bonanza...

"We got this idea to 'rodeo' the cattle. There was a high wall in the garden with two nice big square gate posts. We worked it out that when the cattle came down to get their water at the pond, they'd go through this gate, so I stood on the gate post and dived on the back of one of the cows. Managed to stay on for all of about two seconds. The cattle weren't too happy about it."

Kym Jackson



"My dad worked on the land. He was the eldest of 13. They had a small house in Corse Lawn, but in the garden they had old black sheds where some of the family slept"

Janet Peters



Hardwick Court with an impressive walnut tree

Stewart Taylor recalled the Eldersfield Young Wives Club, set up by his mother, that met at his house every month from 1955 to 2012. Their meetings were meticulously recorded in three log books. Stewart recalled,



"My mother was a tremendous lady. She organised the Young Wives, raised money for the over 65s, brought up the four of us, worked on the farm, stacked bales, bred rabbits, kept chickens and collected the eggs."

Stewart Taylor, whose family farmed the meadows for many years, remembers father playing against son:

"Me and Dad (Bill Taylor) played on opposite sides. He played for Redmarley and I played down the road for Eldersfield. How we managed I don't know, what with the hay and everything, but we had half an hour's practice on the lawn at dinnertime. Dad was a top bowler and turned down an offer to play for Worcestershire to stay on the farm."

Stewart Taylor



Bill Taylor in Redmarley cricket team

1966
Eldersfield Ladies Club was held at Hardwicke House on July 7th. Prayers were read by Mrs Lockley. Minutes were read and signed.

The speaker for the evening was Mr Payne who spoke on about accidents in the home, his talk was mainly concered with children under five. Hundreds who are treated in hospital every year with burns & scalds and taking poisons one of the worst places for children to find poisons are under the kitchen sink and the unlocked medicine cabinet.

The Mrs proposed a vote of Thanks to Mr Payne

It was decided to have a fete at Carse Lawn School in Sept: for the Xmas Coal Fund, the committee were asked to have a meeting and make the arrangements.

The mystery prize was won by Mrs Merchant. The Evening ended with refreshments provided by Mrs Wilts Mrs Canavan & Mrs Robinson.

The cycle of summer sun and winter floods are the essential basis of the floodplain meadows economy. Floods, however, don't always come when they are wanted. Summer thunderstorms could bring torrential rain and much damage to the harvest. Many local farmers have seen bales of hay floating down the flooded brooks. John Humphreys remembers a particularly bad year.



"In 2007 ... most of the arable and grass fields were flooded at a time when everything was growing. Normally when it floods in the winter, the fish in the brooks are at the bottom of the watercourse but it was summer and the fish were up feeding, breeding – they were in the top of the watercourse, they came out and were trapped in the water in the fields. That flood did more damage than a winter flood."

In Pendock, tug-of-war was a matter of great village pride. Local farmer John Humphreys recalled his grandfather being coach and organiser. The team was drawn from locals within a mile of his farm where they trained by pulling on a concrete block tied to a rope slung over the branch of an elm tree. On summer Saturday afternoons, they would travel by coach (with a case of IPA) to local events. John recalled their greatest rivals:

"There were various police teams you had to beware of. They were big boys then and they took it seriously. And they took it badly if they lost. Nothing happened then, but you didn't want to run into them later!"

John Humphreys



Photo by Chris Greensmith



Tug of war team

'Where the Meadows Flower'

The history of Pendock Primary School is as rich as the countryside that surrounds it. That is what the children of Pendock discovered when they began their journey looking into its past. Who better to learn about the history of an area than from those who were there and lived it? It all began with a community Memory Sharing morning. Ex-pupils and local residents came from near and far to share their stories, photos, coins, maps and anecdotes of their school life and living and farming in the local area. Children listened intently as ex-pupils shared mischievous stories and local events that made their time at Pendock so memorable. The morning was enjoyed by all who attended and after sharing hundreds of stories, the visitors stayed to share a hot meal.

After hearing of our wonderful countryside, the pupils were eager to see some of it. So Worcestershire Wildlife Trust took them off to Hardwick Green Meadows. Pupils were taught how to identify different plants and how to catch minibeasts as well as been given the chance to create a fragrant wild perfume using nothing but meadow-sourced ingredients.

With an understanding of life in Pendock's past and an idea of the surrounding countryside, the pupils of Pendock were ready for their project: to deliver a play that would bring much of this history back to life. Visits from Julia Letts and John Townsend helped the children to retell and reimagine what they had learnt. John then took the stories, the scene and the spirit of Pendock and wrote our play: 'Where the Meadows Flower'.

Auditions were held, costumes prepared and rehearsals dominated the timetable. Children were now tasked with embodying the ex-pupils who had visited the school only weeks before. It was a nerve-wracking afternoon but the performance was a resounding success. Many of the ex-pupils and locals came back to see their younger selves act out familiar stories. The importance of the meadows and their preservation was a message that found itself echoing throughout the play: from those that lived the wonderful stories being told to the pupils who were able to view the meadows through the eyes of a previous generation.

by John Greenbank, teacher at Pendock Primary School



A Scene from Where the Meadows flower. Photo by Stephanie Grainger

Historical Happenings around Hardwick

Our historical research revealed more fascinating facts and stories about the area around Hardwick Green Meadows. Here we have a collection of short pieces that pull together a picture of life in the area...

- Compiled by Sue Benjamin, Charlie Jeffes, Kate Collingwood and John Denham



What's In A Name? Elder or Alder; Elder or Ealdhere?

There have been many versions of the name referring to the place of Eldersfield recorded over time. These include:

10th century - Yldresfelda

11th century - Edresfelle (in the Domesday Book), Heldresfelde

12th century - Eddrefeld, Eldresfeld, Heldresseld, Edresfelda

13th century - Eldresfelde

15th century - Ellesfeld, Elsfeld

The accepted origin of the 'field' is from the Anglo-Saxon referring to a clearing or an open, unenclosed expanse of land. However for the origin of the first part of the name "Elder" there appear to be four contestants. Did it originate from:

- The Anglo-Saxon name for the elder plant, which is thought to be from 'aeld' meaning fire because the hollow stems were used as bellows to blow air into the centre of a fire?
- 'yldre', Anglo-Saxon for elder where 'elder' is used to mean elders of some ancient community?
- 'alor', which refers to the alder plant rather than the elder plant because it is often difficult to separate Old English place names 'ellen' and 'ellern' with those from 'alor'?
- Ealdhere, a person's name that has undergone irregular development?

So was the place we now refer to as Eldersfield once open land where the elder grew or open land where the alder grew or open land where elders met or open land that belonged to Ealdhere?



Photo by Julie Jeffes

Marl Pits

In the latter part of the Triassic period over 250 million years ago, sediments were laid down in southwest Worcestershire that formed mudstones, siltstones and fine to coarse-grained sandstones. Collectively, this was referred to as Keuper Marl (now known as the Mercia Mudstone Group) and its erosion gave rise to a mud containing clay and silts and, being rich in lime, calcium carbonate. Outcrops of Arden Sandstone form raised areas above the lowland mudstone.

Dating back to post-medieval times, marl pits are recorded in a number of places throughout Eldersfield; there is one in Pit Field of Hardwick Green Meadows. Due to its lime content, marl (known locally as 'morel') was dug from the ground and applied as a fertiliser.

Although the local grey clay had uses, including making pottery in Roman times, the 'morely' soil is not good for growing crops. In the valuation before sale of Hardwick Court in 1908 there is a warning regarding the value of the surrounding land "he would have the right to cultivate these, but at present price of corn and the nature of the land it would not answer his purpose to do so, particularly portions on the North side of the farm which are poor Marl banks."



"The local clay round here when you get down towards the marsh is grey. It is pretty evil stuff really, for farming, but that is what it is. (...) Roman grey pottery called Severn Ware, typically with a grey band down the center. I can find more pottery on my fields than anywhere else in the area"

John Humphreys recorded in July 2018

William Samuel Symonds

(1818-1887) was a very busy man with many interests. Born in Hereford, he became a graduate of Christ's College Cambridge in 1842 and in the following year became Rector of Pendock. He inherited Pendock Estate from his mother a few years later.

Symonds had an early interest in natural history and later, as a rector of a sparsely populated parish, he had time to avidly pursue geological and archaeological field studies locally and abroad. An active member of respected natural history societies, he was foundation president of the Malvern Naturalists' Field Club from 1853 to 1871. Symonds has been described as a careful, thoughtful observer using his observations to put forward theories not necessarily accepted at the time. He was the author of 43 scientific papers and books on geology and natural history and was described as an excellent speaker. In 'Old Bones or Notes for Young Naturalists' (1861) referring to a fossil fish species *Palaeoniscus superstes*, which lived 250-300 million years ago, he writes,

"I have seen what I believe to be the scales of this fish in the Keuper Sandstone of Pendock and Eldersfield, Worcestershire"

so we may imagine this scholarly clergyman scouring the area with notebook in hand.

William Symonds was an associate of prominent Victorian geologists such as Sir Roderick Impey Murchison and Sir Charles Lyell, dedicating his book *Record of the Rocks* (1872) to the latter in recognition of Lyell's published works and friendship.

This book was indexed by a young Caroline Alice Roberts who was later to become the wife of composer Edward Elgar. Symond's daughter, Hyacinth, became the second wife of Sir Joseph Hooker, a renowned botanist and a close friend of Charles Darwin.

Besides being a natural scientist of note, Symonds also wrote two popular medieval romantic novels, 'Malvern Chase: an autobiographical account of the Wars of the Roses' (1881) and 'Hanley Castle: an episode of the Civil Wars and the Battle of Worcester' (1883), where he employed his extensive research and knowledge of the locality and its history to inform his writing.

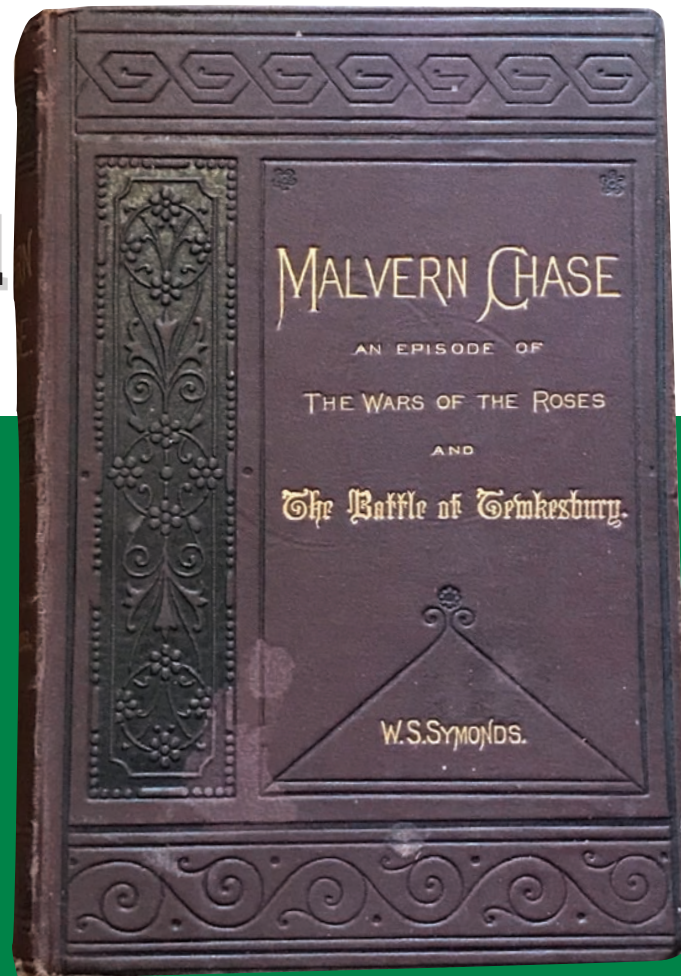


Photo by Julie Jeffes

'Malvern Chase' obviously satisfied the Victorian gothic literary preferences as six editions were published in ten years. The Rev William Samuel Symonds was buried in Pendock churchyard. It is suggested that 'the great and fatiguing exertions he underwent in pursuit of geological and natural sciences' may have contributed to the heart disease and other complications which caused his death.

The passage below is an extract from his obituary, which appeared in the *Geological Magazine* in 1887:

"The main object of Mr. Symonds' active and useful career, and to the furtherance of which all his best energies were directed, was the promotion of a love for Geological, Botanical, and Archaeological pursuits and studies, amongst the very large circle of educated people in the West of England by whom he was surrounded, whose tastes he strove to elevate and direct, and whose leisure hours he endeavoured to occupy with healthful and intellectual pursuits."

The Witch of Eldersfield : who was she?

"When we were small children Mum always used to say ' Don't ever come down here in the dark because that's where the Witch of Eldersfield lives and comes out on the marsh (...) to make sure there's no naughty children out there."

Ann Heywood when asked about the old cottage in Hardwick Green Meadows. Recorded August 2018.

There have been stories of a local witch, Mary of Eldersfield, for a very long time but was she someone to be feared? In the Reverend William Symonds's popular Victorian novel 'Malvern Chase' he decided that Mary of Eldersfield was a successful herbalist with an extensive knowledge of the medicinal properties of the local plants rather than a witch with evil intentions. In the novel Mary was taken by soldiers to be tried as a witch but local support saved her from the ducking stool.

"As we emerged from the forest to the knoll on which stands the church, we saw a tall, somewhat masculine, middle-aged woman, with large black eyes of a most searching character, sitting upon a large stone, and carrying in her hand a great bunch of wild sages freshly gathered. I at once knew this could be no other than the celebrated "Mary of Eldersfield" whom some called a witch and others a herbalist. In former days she used to come to Berew and our Manor House, but latterly she had led the life of a recluse, going nowhere save to the house of sickness, where with her great skill and famous medicaments she was ever welcome."

It is reasonable to assume in a rural area that there was a local herbalist and that her name was Mary. The Eldersfield area certainly would have provided Mary with many different plants from which she could extract from roots, stems, berries, flowers and leaves the 'tricks of her trade'.

If she had been successful in treating ailments there may well have been those who thought her cures were evident of witchcraft.

If the name of Eldersfield originates from the elder trees, perhaps the stories of a witch arose because of the association of elders with witches? Elder was traditionally a tree of doom and death and witches were thought to have been able to turn themselves into elder trees. However, the healing properties of the bark, flowers, berries and leaves have been noted in early literature. One 18th century herbalist wrote that if its medicinal properties were thoroughly known this hedgerow plant would cure any ailment a country man was likely to encounter.

"Supposed to live on the Gadbury Bank, whether she did or no, we don't know. I understood they did try her on the ducking stool and her friends saved her...we were a bit anxious of her."

Reg Bullock recorded December 2018



Drawing by Lettie Challenor (age 7)

How Malvern Chase was named

In 1083 William the Conqueror designated as Royal Forest the land lying between the Malvern Hills and The River Severn in Worcestershire, extending into Herefordshire and bordering Cors Forest in the south.

At least some of this land had previously been used as hunting grounds for bishops and was mentioned in the Domesday Book as Malferna Forest. When Edward I passed the Royal Forest to the Earl of Gloucester in 1290 it became known as Malvern Chace (later Chase). There were no defined borders or precise records and it has been assumed that Eldersfield parish was part of the Chase, Cors Chase also being passed to the Earl.

The Chase had its own laws and customs and was administered from the castle at Hanley. It was illegal to hunt deer within the Chase and its borders although commoners had the right to graze animals and feed their pigs on the oak mast (acorns). Punishments for those who broke the laws were harsh and it is recorded that poachers and other miscreants could be sentenced to death by the axe of the Chief Forester.

The Chase survived for over 500 years but a decree was issued in 1632 for the 'disafforestation of the Chace of Malvern' by Charles I and the jurisdiction of Forest Law was removed. The king required funds, enclosed a third of the forest and sold it. Historic Common Rights were confirmed to the local inhabitants on the remaining two-thirds although there were several disputes with landowners to uphold these. Red deer, no longer protected by Forest Law, became extinct within Worcestershire following the activities of the Civil War.

Cors Forest by the 1490s became known as Corse Lawn, suggesting that the glades and clearings of this area had become a similar size to the remaining woodland. By 1779 all the trees had been cleared and the area became a wide and level open common.



Castlemorton Common (Malvern Chase).
Photo by Wendy Carter

Herbal properties of the great burnet

Mary of Eldersfield, as a talented and successful herbalist, would have had a diverse range of plant species at her disposal locally. One of these may have been the great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, a special feature of Hardwick Green Meadows in the summer when its purplish-red dense ovoid flowers on long stalks bloom in profusion.

This plant has been used in herbal treatments for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. In Chinese medicine a preparation called Di Yu is made from the plant's root and Culpepper (1653) gives instructions for its use as a general tonic: "Two or three stalks, with leaves, put into a cup of wine, especially claret, are known to quicken the spirits, refresh and sheer

the heart, and drive away melancholy." The first part of the great burnet's Latin scientific name '*sanguis*' means 'blood' and the second part '*sorba*' means 'to soak up', which hints at this plant's medicinal benefits. In the middle ages people tended to assess the possible benefits of a plant by its appearance. Hence the quite solid red inflorescence of the great burnet suggested that it should be used for the treatment of complaints by soaking up blood and slowing down its flow. Preparations from the plant's roots, stems and leaves have been and still are used to treat such external conditions as wounds, burns, eczema, rashes, boils, haemorrhoids and insect bites and internal conditions as bladder problems, diuresis, dysentery, diarrhoea, nose bleeds and varicose veins.



Great burnet photos by Wendy Carter and Paul Lane



Hardwick Court

Hardwick Court

Hardwick is mentioned in the Domesday survey, where the Prior of St Mary's in Lyre is recorded as holding one virgate in Hardwick in Eldersfield.

William, Earl of Gloucester is said to have given Hardwick to Thomas Delamare sometime before his death in 1183. The inventory of Richard Delamare's effects, valued at £202.18s, and including armour and weapons, made on his death in 1613 reveals a well-furnished house at a time when the average farmer possessed only a few household items. The Delamare family held the Manor until 1628 when another Thomas Delamare sold it to Thomas, Lord Coventry of Croome D'Abitot and it remained in the hands of his descendants until 1921 when it was placed into the hands of the Croome Estate Trust.

The first tenant listed in surviving records was John Meredith, who appears in the Parish records as a churchwarden between 1752 and 1763. After he died in 1785 his son, also John, continued to hold the lease. In 1795 George William, Earl of Coventry leased Hardwick Court for 21 years to John Need, who was living there, and Robert Higgins of Longdon at a yearly rent of £200, which increased by £10 an acre if they grew flax, hemp or rape. The lease included Hardwick Court itself with barns, stables, gardens and appurtenances thereto, together with a small tenement called Wingates Homestall. The land amounted to 112 acres of arable land, 49 acres of

meadow and 62 acres of pasture, total 220 acres three roods and two perches.

John Need was succeeded in the tenancy by John Higgins, then James Hartwright and then, in the 1841 Census, Thomas Jeffes, a farmer aged 40, and his wife Eliza aged 25 are living there with their five year old son Thomas and four farm servants. By 1851 Thomas Jeffes is identified as a farmer of 146 acres employing three labourers and has his niece Susannah Biscoe in the house. In 1861 Thomas' sister Charlotte, aged 64, is staying together with a nephew Frederick Biscoe, aged 14 and employed as a farm servant.

By 1871 Thomas senior has died and Thomas junior has taken on the tenancy with his wife Jane, who came from Newport, Monmouthshire. He is listed as a farmer of 285 acres with three children and employing seven men, two women and one boy. By 1881 the holding was reduced to 231 acres with four men and a boy and the Jeffes have added a son to their brood. In 1891 and 1901 Ernest Edward is the only Jeffes offspring still at home and by 1911 he has taken over the tenancy with his wife Elizabeth.

Owing to the huge cost of running the estate and the desire of George William, the 9th Earl of Coventry, not to split it by selling off part of it to reduce the tax burden, the whole estate was placed in the hands of the Croome Estate Trust in 1921. Arthur Jackson appears in the Worcestershire Directory in 1932 as the owner/occupier of Hardwick Court so must have bought the property from the Croome Estate between 1930 and 1932. It remained in the Jackson family until 1987 when it was bought by Fraser and Sally Flower. Finally, in 1993, Charlie Jeffes bought Hardwick Court back into the family that had tenanted it for so long.

Hardwick Court is listed in the Historic Environment Record as having 14th century and later features but may well include older remnants. It is surrounded by the remains of a moat, which also embraces a range of model farm buildings erected by the Earl of Coventry in 1870.

*To Manage Cyder & Perry
To fine it, work up a Quantity of
Isinglass in a Tubb with some of
the same Liquor for 8 or 9 days by
drawing fresh into it every day and
well beat it up ^{before you draw.} with a Swift Lathering
Rod, then your Cyder being clean rack'd off
you must put in the Glasse which is
to every Hhd about 2 Bunces well Rowed
about in it with a stick, and in 9 or 10
days will drop down fine, then take it off in Glasse
and put a pound of Burnt Sugar to each
Hogshead which gives it an Excellent
Colour. N.B. If your Liquor at any
time is flat you may revive it thus
Break a pound of Sugar ^{or loaf Sugar} (and y^e 10 pieces)
and put it in the Hogshead of Cyder or
Perry, which if it be ever so flat
will bring it alive again.*

Hardwick Court ledger, 1777, about how to manage cider and perry



Marsh Court in 2020

Marsh Court

Marsh Court, formerly known as Marsh Place, was a dependent Manor of Eldersfield.

The history of the house is confused and it appears not to have remained in one ownership or tenancy for substantial periods. It was sold on Wed 19th June 1895 at the Swan Inn, Tewkesbury, and was at that time tenanted by Edwin Shipton at a rent of £284 a year. It was described as a substantial six bedroom brick and timber manor house with a carriage drive and two newly built brick dwelling houses forming an entrance lodge to the estate from Bridge End. The sale included a mill house, farm buildings and a labourer's cottage called Walmers, probably demolished about 1970. Its land extended to 226 acres and grazing for 28 sheep in or over Eldersfield Marsh. Unfortunately the sale particulars do not record who was selling or who bought it but Edwin Shipton's tenancy continued until after 1911.

Hardwick Green Field Names

Hardwick is derived from old English and is the amalgamation of Herd, a man who tends livestock, and Wick, old English for a hamlet. It has been spelt differently over the years: in the 1183 Pipe Rolls it appears as Herdewiche, in the Red Book of the Exchequer of 1210 & 1212 it is Ordewike and in the 11th century it is called Heordwic.

These variations come about partly due to the impreciseness of spelling at the time of the scribes and how they interpreted the local accents & dialects. This transference of names is very common amongst field names as they are passed orally down the generations.

Hardwick Green Meadows consists of 20 hectares of land in seven fields. The following field names are relatively modern and incorporate old field names.

i) Gilberts (5.8 hectares)

Probably named after the Gilbert family. Sarah Gilbert is named in an indenture of 1761 for an un-named field in Eldersfield. In the 1842 Enclosure Awards tithe map Gilberts comprised three fields - Summers, Peakham (formerly Stirks) & Hurst Meadow.

Summers – probably indicates the field is low-lying and only suitable for summer grazing or hay meadows.

Peakham – a pointed-end field (peak) on a ham, the old English for a grassland enclosure on the bend of a river (here the Longdon Brook).

Stirks – old English for tail – can describe a long narrow field or pointed end to a field.

Hurst Meadow – Old English for a wood. Maybe originally part of a larger Rye Coppice next door.



1842 tithe map

Common Fields

- 1 - Hardwick Field
- 2 - Man Meadow
- 3 - Grove Meadow
- 4 - Waladine Meadow
- 5 - The Marsh

- A - Summers
- B - Peakham (was Stirks)
- C - Hurst Meadow
- D - Middle Ground
- E - Cottage Yard (Walmers)
- F - The Pleck
- G - The Marsh
- H - Home Ground
- I - The Rise Wood
- J - The Rise

- K, L & M - P Grove Meadows
- N, O & P - The Rise
- Q - P Grove Meadows
- R - Elsfold
- S - Spells Meadow
- T - Ground Adjoining Mayo
- U & V - Smithfield
- W - The Acre
- X - Plain Meadow
- Y - Smithfield
- Z - Brace Hay

- o Mayo
- ▲ Walmers / J. Halsey
- Jeffes
- Tombs

ii) Lanes (4.2 hectares)

Formerly part of Man Meadows. Mon Meadow appears on a conveyance of 1649. It was a common meadow. 'Mon' is a description of land lying on or close to the parish boundary, which is the case here as both Pendock and Berrow are the other side of Longdon Brook. It is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word maene meaning "boundary land". Mon is a West County form of "Man".

There is no mention of any "Lanes" in Man Meadow but a Samuel Lane appears in one of the other common fields in Eldersfield. As tenancies changed hands regularly it is quite likely the Lane family at some stage had interests in Man Meadow. The Lanes are mentioned in records of the Earls of Coventry, who owned Hardwick Court 1640 – 1921.

iii) North Little Field (1.0 hectares)

Part of Man Meadow originally.

iv) Little Field (1.55 hectares)

Part of Man Meadow originally. This field was either named Little Field because of its small size or it could have been named after one of the "Little family" who were prolific in Eldersfield in the 19th century. It's most probably the former as it's a relatively recent name.

v) Taylor's Field (3.0 hectares)

Part of Man Meadow originally, now named after Stuart Taylor.

vi) The Pit Field (3.44 hectares)

Pit Field, as it is presently called, was originally an old marl pit. It was also the site of Walmers Cottage which would also account for the unevenness of the area. Walmers Cottage (named on an 1881 map) was still standing in the 1960s when local children used to play in the ruins. On the 1842 map this is five small fields and a small cottage.

Home Ground is usually given to the field closest to the homestead as in this case.

The Pleck is a small patch of worthless ground.

The Marsh adjoins Eldersfield Marsh and may have been part of it at some time. (Now field vii)

Middle Ground is so-called as it is surrounded by other fields under the same ownership.

Cottage and yard next to Walmers Cottage and now called Marshlands.

The only census return that names the cottage specifically as Walmers Cottage is the 1911 census when Charles Brookes and his large family of 8 children (aged between 21 and 1 year old) lived there.

The Hydrology of Hardwick Green Meadows

I was appointed Hardwick Green volunteer reserve manager in 2016, at the time I was a student seeking a dissertation topic. With the Trust needing information about the site we had a win-win situation! My research investigated Hardwick Green's grassland communities and ecohydrology, and the extent to which they interact.

Hydrology was assessed using dipwells to identify water table levels. These were 2m lengths of 40mm drainage pipe sunk vertically into the ground with horizontal holes drilled into them to allow free movement of soil water. In January/February 2017 25 dipwells were put into the site in transects each of four or five dipwells spaced 25 metres apart. The dipwells were monitored weekly for a year (February 2017 to February 2018). The distance between ground level and the water level in the pipe was measured, identifying the water table level relative to the surface.

Grassland flora community composition was assessed using two 1x1m quadrats placed either side of each dipwell (50 quadrats). Species coverage within each quadrat was recorded and this information was then processed using software designed for the purpose.

The dipwell/water table depth data, when compared with expected water table levels for the Hardwick Green floodplain

by Chris Greensmith, WWT Trustee and Volunteer Reserve Warden at Hardwick Green Meadows

meadow grassland community, was found to sit substantially below the levels expected for this grassland community. However, the grassland species data processing still classified much of the site as floodplain meadow grassland.

This grassland classification was surprising, given that the site's dipwell data indicated its water tables were at a level at which grassland community change was expected. It seems dryness is a long-term feature of the site, the floodplain meadow grassland being maintained by seasonal inundation and soil impermeability rather than the water table.

The dipwell recording continues - at the time of writing (January/February 2020) I am at the end of the third year of (now fortnightly) recording.



Dipwell and test equipment. Photo by Chris Greensmith

Haiku schools' poetry competition

Schools across Worcestershire were invited to take part in a haiku poetry competition. The winning entries are:

**Centipede glides through
With its millions of legs
One step at a time**

- Bredon Hill Academy

**Prickly shy hedgehog
Scurrying and scrambling
Around the long grass**

- Matchborough First School Academy



Meadows Remembered

Please listen to our CD enclosed within the booklet. It tells the story of the Hardwick area through the voices of the people who were interviewed during our oral history project. You will be guided through the stories by our volunteer John Denham.

The entire collection of over 30 hours of recorded interviews can be found and listened to in the archives of The Hive in Worcester.

The audio CD on the page opposite contains the voices and views of the people we recorded for the 'Forgotten Floodplains; Meadows Remembered' oral history project. It is narrated by one of our volunteers, John Denham.

For more than a year our oral history producer, Julia Letts, and two volunteers, John Denham and Sue Benjamin, interviewed a variety of people from Eldersfield, Pendock and Corse Lawn, creating a record of how folk experienced life in this area through the 20th century. This CD contains just a fraction of what they told us. As well as full versions of the interviews at The Hive there are further extracts on our website at www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk.

- Track 01** Introduction
- Track 02** 1930s and 1940s: pigs, planes and POW's
- Track 03** Growing up in the fields: the tin bath boat and other stories
- Track 04** The fields: the drains, the hay and the harvest
- Track 05** 'The Fellows who cut the hay': memories of former owners
- Track 06** In praise of trees; elms and orchards
- Track 07** Pendock school: the Queen, the Archers and Sally the Sow
- Track 08** Progress (and lots of mud): the building of the M50
- Track 09** Discovering the Floodplains: Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's story
- Track 10** How to let your hair down: dances, outings, parties and sport
- Track 11** Final thoughts: the meadows remembered

We are immensely grateful to all our interviewees who gave us their time, shared their memories and gave us permission to use their stories. Particular thanks go to Ann Heywood, Beryl Jackson, Charlie Jeffes, Chris Greensmith, Dick Voyce, Frieda Griffiths, Harold Davis, John Humphreys, John Keighley, John Sermon, Kym Jackson, Liz Jeffes, Mary Mitchell, Mary Williams, Pat Keighley, Reg Roberts, Rex Bullock, Rob Allen, Stewart Taylor, Sylvia White, Tom Jackson and Val Bundy.



Photo by Julia Letts

Meadows of the Malvern Chase cycle route

Included with this booklet is a cycle route map. It is a 34.3 mile route encompassing nine Worcestershire Wildlife Trust nature reserves in the area, including Hardwick Green Meadows. The Trust has worked with Sustrans, the national charity encouraging sustainable transport, to devise and develop this route. It includes seven pubs and one fruit farm (with café) so there are plenty of opportunities for rest and refreshment.





**Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust**



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is the county's leading local charity working to conserve and restore wildlife and wild places. Worcester Wildlife Trust relies on the support of its members and on donations and grants.

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