

# Mottey Meadows History: Listening among Friends

## Introduction

To be friends of a place suggests familiarity and loyalty: knowing what a place is about and being willing to defend it against threats, threats to its distinctive qualities and what it means to those who get their livelihood, inspiration or pleasure from it.

Many places have a long history of use and knowing a place often involves knowing facts about its past and stories about what has happened there. The evidence of such things is very varied – it can include documents, maps, photographs and other images, features on the ground itself and memories and feeling in the minds and hearts of those who have somehow made a place their own. Such historical evidence can be hard to find – permanently lost even, with the destruction of records and personal property or the death of those who remembered a particular place. And searching out and recording such evidence requires particular skills, patience and time.

But friends of a place can make a start by enquiring about what remains of its history, cataloguing the written sources and listening to those who have memories – listening to one another where the value of a place is shared among a group.

This brief report represents one such enquiry about Mottey Meadows, where there is already an energetic group of friends whose familiarity with and loyalty to the place are clear. It provides a summary of some information, in existing reports and newly gathered, and is offered as an encouragement to go further in understanding the character and value of a remarkable place.

The fabric of the following account is provided by oral information from Clive Blakemore, Chris (Wes) Weate and Sid Marson in January 1988 (in Shepherd, P.A. & Rieley, J.O. 1988) and in conversations with John Rodwell in April 2011. Additional details have been included from Weate (1982), a locally published history by an aunt of Wes Weate, now living in Lichfield, who holds a significant archive of material relating to the parish and family. Coleshaw & Walker (2005) provides archaeological information about three fields.

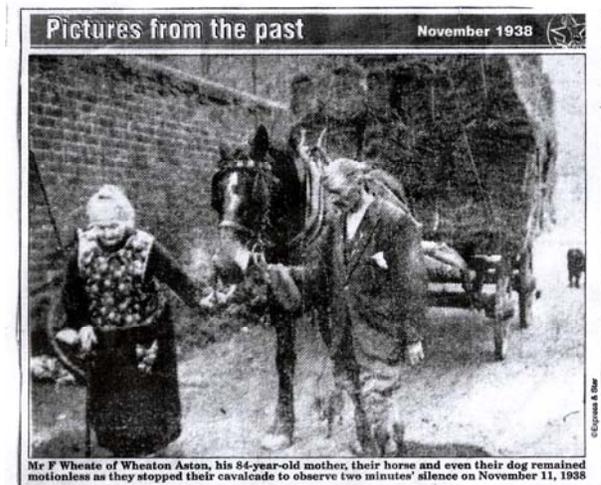
The particular fields for which oral and other information is available are shown on Map 1 using the compartment numbers in Coleshaw & Walker (2005) and Map 2 shows the names by which the oral sources know the fields at the present time. Map 3 shows the names given to the fields in the 1840 Tithe Apportionment with an indication of the few fields which were then pasture or arable. Map 4 shows a comparison of field boundaries in 1840 (from the Tithe Apportionment) and in 1987 (from Shepherd, P.A. & Rieley, J.O. 1988). There is very little difference between the field boundaries at the latter date and as shown in a 1920 sale document for a large estate in the parish (Anon 1920).

## Oral evidence about the management of the meadows

Clive and Wes have a strong sense of belonging to the place and are from families which can trace their local history in the village for 400 years. Sid is now the oldest surviving farmer, having retired at 70 some years ago. Their knowledge of the meadows is long, first hand and particular: as Sid said 'We've had some queer experiences down there'.

In Clive's time, farming with his father, there were six farms in the village with some land-swapping between them. For tasks like hay-making, equipment like a baler was loaned and the work shared.

Traditionally the meadows were grazed from September to February though, in very wet years, the animals might not be able to stay on after early December. The hay was cut when it was ready and when weather allowed - generally not before July, sometimes into August in bad years - before the days of chemical fertilisers. After drying and piling into grass cocks in the fields, the hay was carted away, surplus going to brewery dry horses in Wolverhampton.

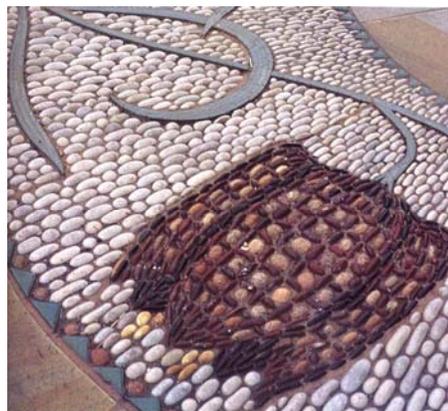


Fields would have been fertilised by farmyard manure (every two years according to Clive) and more recently by chemical fertiliser as prill every year. Now 'occasional applications of farmyard manure should be tolerated in some of the hay meadows to maintain yields but no other inputs of fertiliser are necessary or desirable' according to Coleshaw, T. & Walker, G. (2005).

Now three local farmers have mowing and grazing licences on the fields within the National Nature Reserve but none derives a significant proportion of income from this land. Clive farms land at the north end of the NNR (Compartments 2a, 2b, 3a and 4) and in the middle (Compartments 8aN, 8aS, 8b, 9a and 9b). When his father was alive, they ran a viable sheep operation before a disastrous episode of disease but he now sustains his farming by a livery business, getting other support from Stewardship and Farmcare.

Hay making is still something of an event with a team of recruited workers and Clive keeps a *Hay Book* which records who did what work and how many bales were produced from each meadow. The data show a clear drop in the amount of hay from the meadows within the NNR and he now cuts only half of the possible 100 acres. He is disparaging about the agricultural quality of the hay from the more flower-rich meadows which sheep would have eaten but which is completely unacceptable to his horses or for sale. Other wider factors affect the viability of hay production: in 2001, a bale cost 36p to produce and sold for £2.50, in 2011 the cost is 156p, the price £5.00.

The Fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) once grew 'in great profusion in the peaty fields near Marston' and, known locally as 'Falfillary' or 'Falfalarum' (a name first recorded in 1787), the flowers were traditionally gathered for a wake held, by 1834, on Trinity Sunday, a variable date which was the Sunday after Whitsunday, then transferred to the first Sunday in May. A pebble mosaic by Maggy Howarth (Howarth 2003) outside the church in Wheaton Aston commemorates the association of the village with this plant.



## Oral and other evidence about particular fields

### **Compartment 2a (Cross Stiles part in 2011, Tomlinson's Leasow part in 1840)**

This field used to have a marl pit adjacent to Marston Road. The field was ploughed in 1939 and a three-year rotation of sugar beet and cereals grown until 7-8 years ago when it was returned to meadow.

### **Compartment 3A (Gravel Pit Field in 1840)**

Ploughed between 1840 and 1910 and spread with marl from the pit nearby.

### **Compartment 8aN (Rabbit Burys in 2011, Micklemore Meadow part in 1840)**

Was ploughed 30 years ago because it provided poor grazing and was sown with potatoes for 2 years. Drainage was so bad that the tractor got stuck to the wheel tops and the potatoes were harvested by hand. Afterwards the field was returned to meadow.

### **Compartment 8aS (Shed Meadow in 2011, Micklemore Meadow part in 1840)**

30-40 years ago, the previous tenant, Mr Shaw grazed cattle on 8aS and milked them by hand in a shed at the end of Cauldmore Lane.

### **Compartment 8b (The Slang in 2011, Near Briar Furlong in 1840)**

30-40 years ago was a market garden when 3 hawthorn brush drains were installed to take water to a peripheral ditch to the south. Ploughed and re-seeded thereafter.

### **Compartments 9a and 9b (Motte Meadows in 2011, Micklemore Meadow, Keeping Place Meadow & Far Briar furlong in 1840)**

In living memory always used for hay and not fertilised with manure (because too far from the farm buildings) or with marl but fertilised with nitro-chalk at 200-250lbs every year.

**Compartments (all unnamed in 2011) 10 (Micklemore Meadow & Dollymoor Meadow), 11 (Worly's Meadow, Rough Leasow & Micklemore Meadow), 12 (Micklemore Meadow), 13 (Moor), 14 (Two Doles), 15 (Woodwards) & 17 (New Woodbridge Meadow)** Always used for hay. Coleshaw, T. & Walker, G. (2005) notes that **Compartments 10 and 11** retain surface features of a water meadow and the

1840 Tithe Apportionment has signs of strips with open gutters between in **Compartment 14**.

**Compartment 16 (Micklemoor Meadow in 1840)**

Used to grow wheat in the past.

**References**

Anon (1840). Tithe Apportionment Book and Map B/A/15 in Lichfield Record Office or 1878 copy as Map/45 in Wolverhampton Archives.

Anon (1920). Sale particulars & Map for the Mottey Estate.

Coleshaw, T. & Walker, G. (2005). *Mottey Meadows Management Plan*. Shrewsbury: Natural England & Rodwell, J.S. (2011) Interview notes.

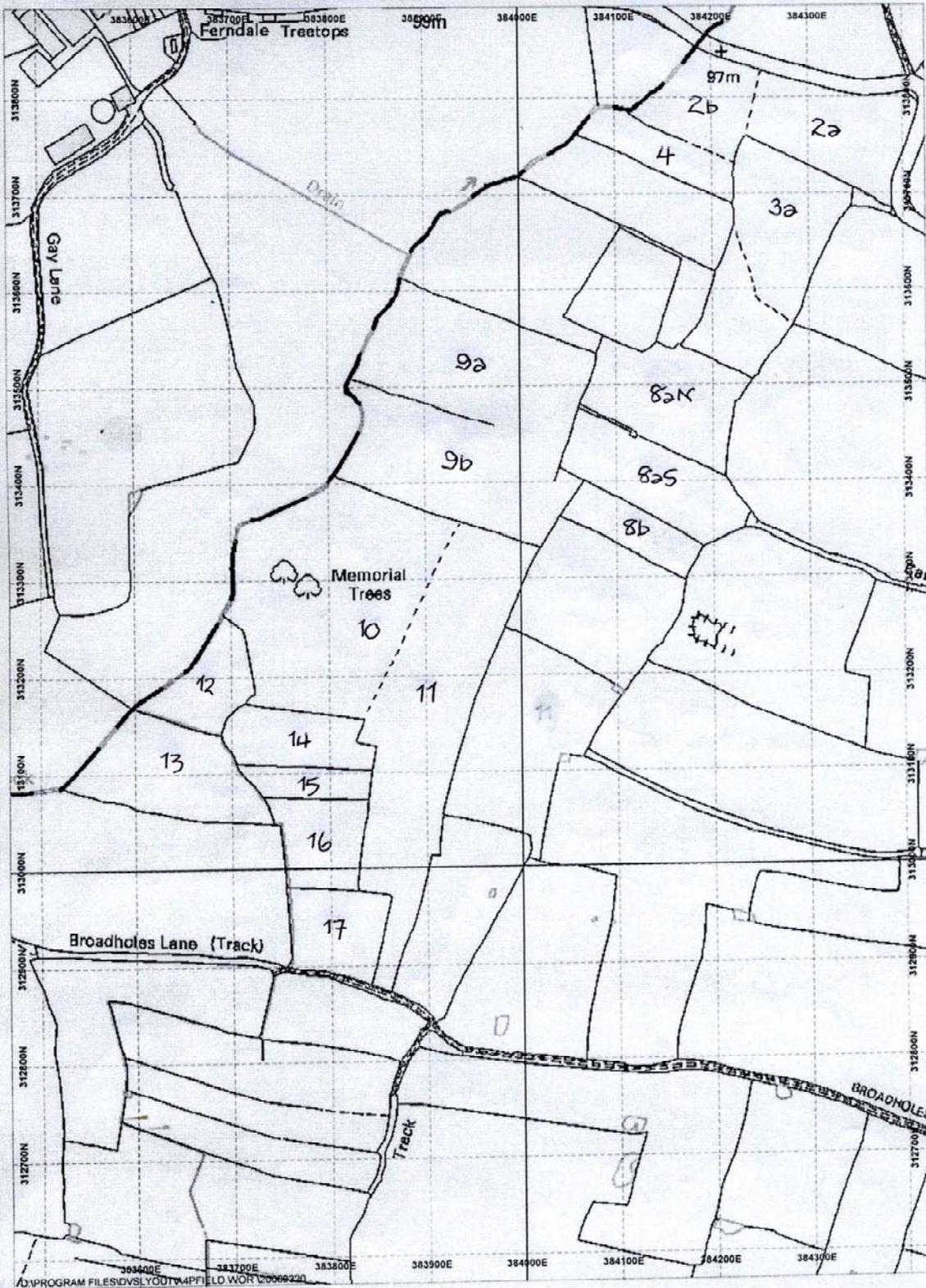
Howarth, M. (2003). *The Complete Pebble Mosaic Handbook*. (London: Frances Lincoln).

Shepherd, P.A. & Rieley, J.O. (1988). *Historical Information on Mottey Meadows NNR, Staffordshire* (Nottingham: James Davies & Partners).

Weate, M. (1982). *The Parish of Lapley-with-Wheaton Aston*, (Lapley: Lapley Parish Council)

# Map 1 Compartment numbers

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Map 4 Changes in field boundaries between 1840 and 1987

