

Estimating the historic extent of floodplain meadows in the Yorkshire Ouse catchment

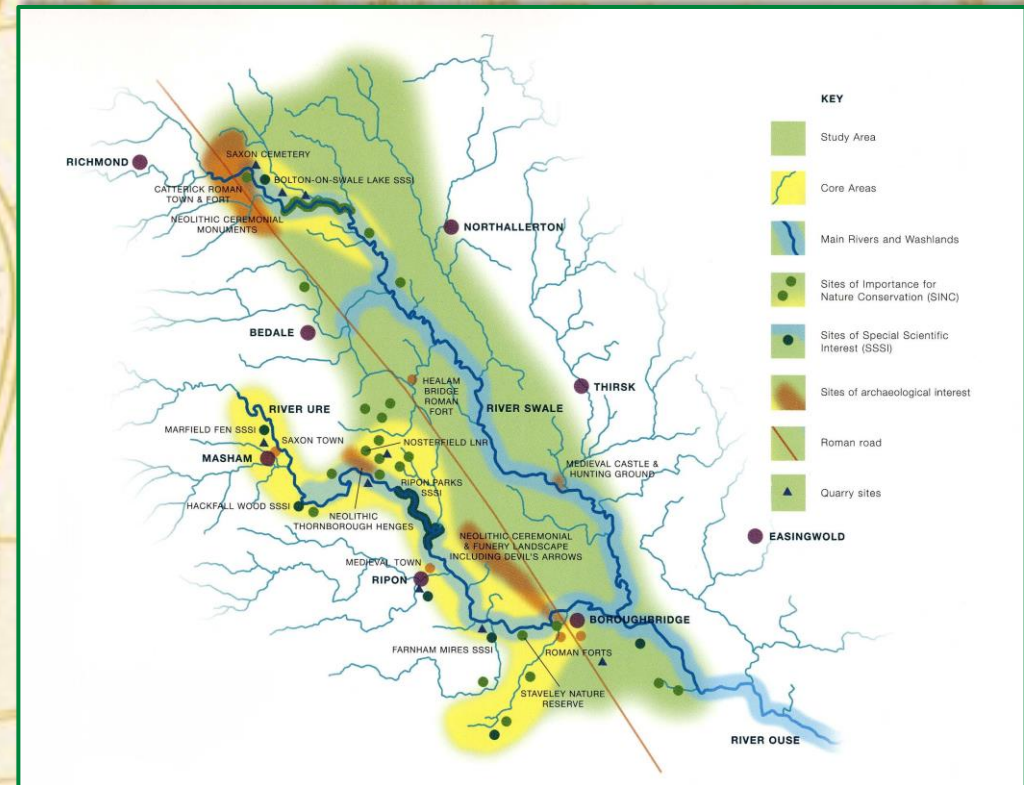
Martin Hammond



Study areas

Two slightly overlapping areas of the Ouse catchment studied in separate projects:

1. Lower Swale and Ure valleys ('Swale & Ure Washlands') in the Vale of Mowbray and northern Vale of York.



2. Ouse corridor from Swale/Ure confluence to Derwent confluence in the Vale of York.

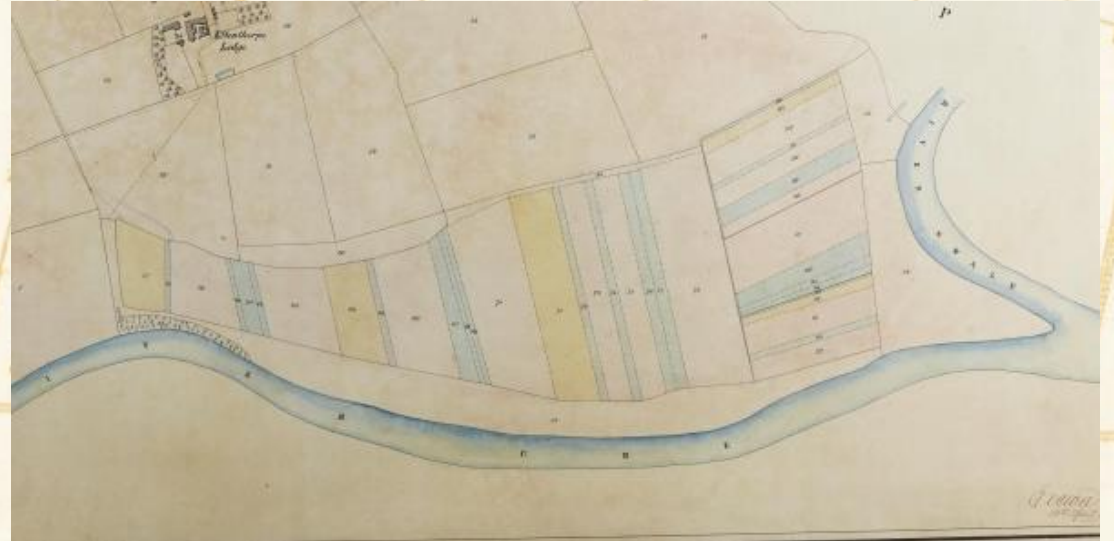


Sources

- Domesday Book
- Monastic Cartularies (*Monasticon Eboracense*) and other records e.g. Coucher Book of Selby Abbey
- Inquisitions Post Mortem (provide relative values of meadow, pasture & arable)
- Estate inventories, deeds, conveyances, Feet of Fines
- Legal disputes, e.g. Star Chamber, ecclesiastical courts
- Manorial rolls (regulation & management of common lands)
- Estate maps
- Permabulations
- Literary evidence e.g. Andrew Marvell's *Upon Appleton House* (1651) – poetic account of cycle of hay making, aftermath grazing, flooding
- Enclosure Award maps
- Early OS maps
- Georgian & Victorian newspapers (British Newspaper Archive)
- Botanical records & herbaria
- Occasional archaeological evidence e.g. hay remains from Roman Colonia in York
- Place names

Common meadows (Ings)

- Widespread evidence of division of open meadows into numerous strips (doles) with common-right grazing on the aftermath.
- Essentially same system as e.g. Lugg Meadows in Herefordshire, Thames meadows in Oxfordshire
- Use of township lands overseen by Manorial courts, abundant evidence of sustainable management.

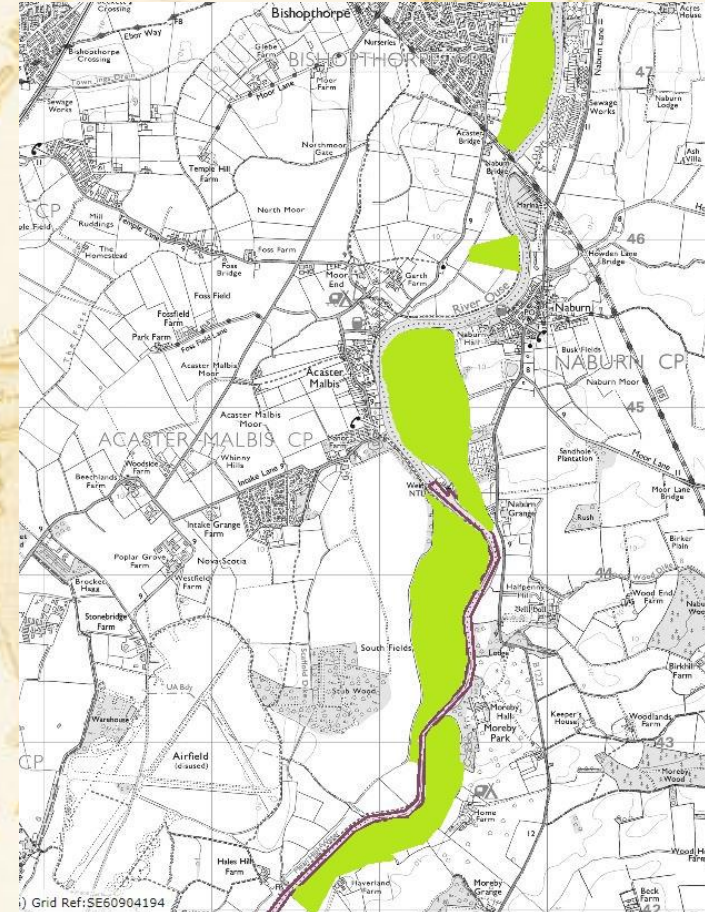


Ellenthorpe Ings at the junction of the Swale and Ure in the mid-19th century. Extract from *Plan of the Township of Ellenthorpe in the Parish of Aldborough, North Riding of Yorkshire* (1847), NYCRO [T]PR-ALB6-6A4, courtesy of the North Yorkshire County Records Office.

River Ouse

Historic extent of floodplain meadows well understood:

- *“Of the 32 townships on the Ouse above the Rivers Aire and Derwent, only three...did not have Ings”* (Waddell, 2013).
- Less research on common meadows on smaller watercourses, which did exist and were probably widespread.



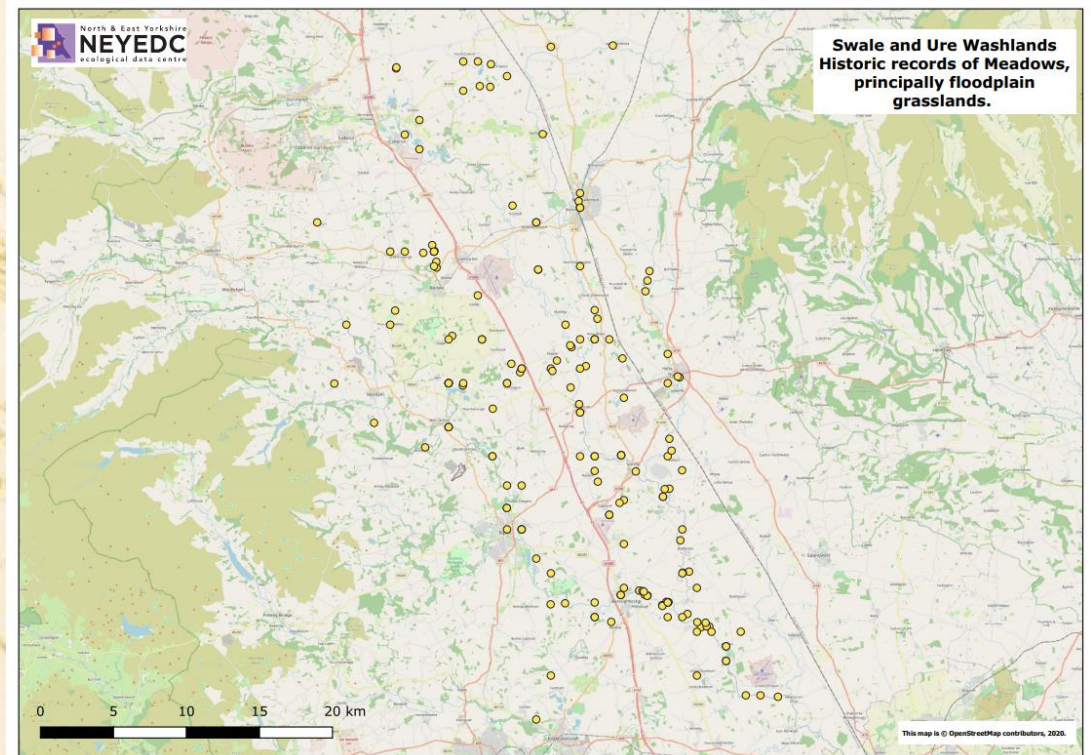
River Ouse

- Pre-enclosure extent 1,236 ha
- Surviving unimproved meadows supporting characteristic plant communities – 114 ha in 5 SSSIs
- + ca. 19 ha degraded/semi-improved but with potential for restoration
- 90.3% loss



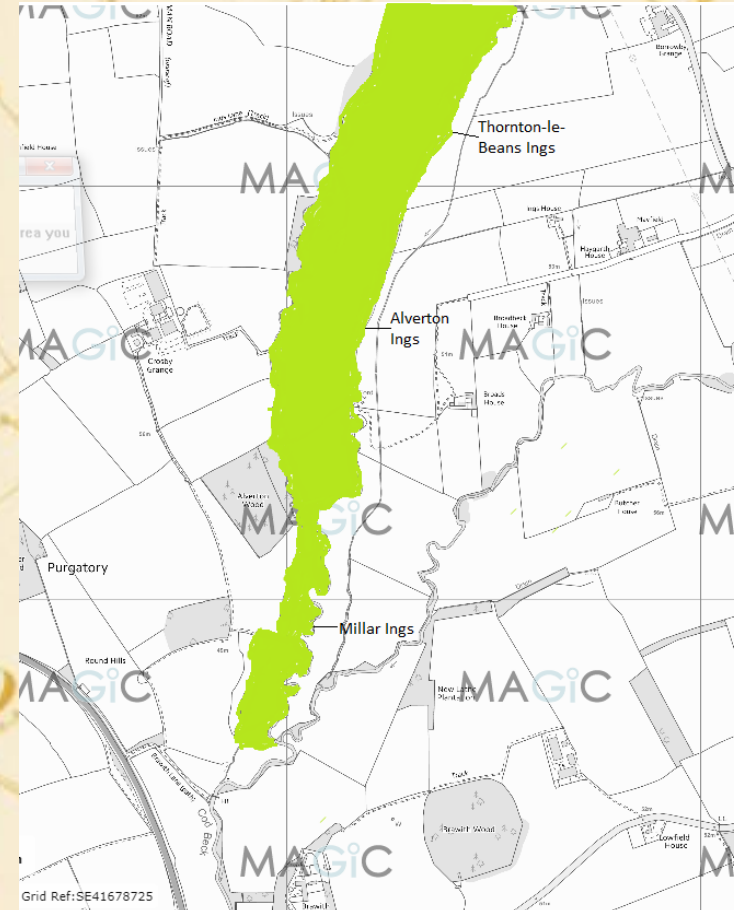
Swale & Ure Washlands

- Overlooked historic concentration of floodplain meadows as no intact examples survive.
- More late medieval/early modern enclosure, some Ings had disappeared before 1st edition OS maps, so boundaries cannot be reliably reconstructed.
- Nearly 100 named Ings identified.
- Meadowland worth average 4x arable land in 13th/14th centuries



Swale & Ure Washlands

- Rough tally of known sites 1,007 ha but several potential large meadows on River Ure difficult to trace
- Reasonable estimate of >1,300 ha historic extent. 100% lost.
- Ings occurred alongside smaller watercourses as well as main rivers. Some very large tracts of floodplain hay meadow, e.g. hundreds of hectares along Cod Beck shared between several townships which belonged to the Bishop of Durham's estates.



Lower Wharfe

- Other tributaries of the River Ouse supported floodplain meadows including the Nidd, Wharfe and Aire.
- Extensive Ings on the Wharfe downstream of Wetherby, perhaps around 400 ha in the early 19th century.
- Very little remaining, areas of MG4 grassland recently sprayed out. Some damaged/semi-improved meadow capable of restoration.

