



The Eye

The annual publication of the Eye Brook Community Heritage Project

Issue 1

Do you know where you live?

How much do we know about the area around us? What role do we each have to play in our local landscape? Who manages this landscape and its wildlife today, and who did so in the past? Is the 'environment' and the wildlife associated with it something 'nice to have', or is it more than that – how can we benefit from it? Learning about our local cultural and natural heritage is central to these questions. In doing so, it does no harm

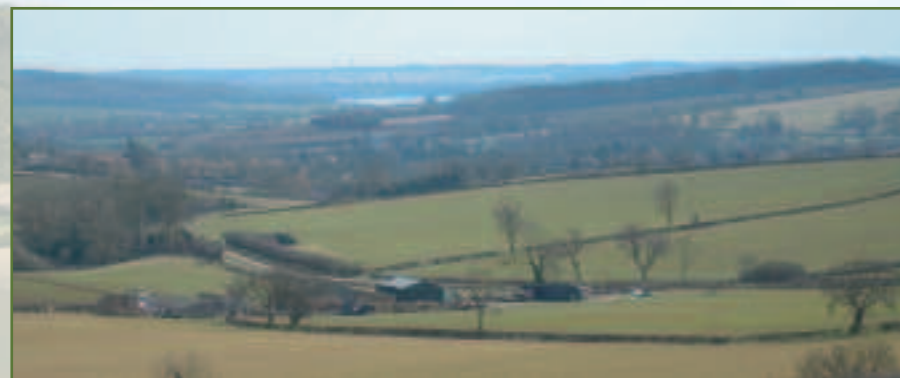
to abandon administrative boundaries and consider natural ones such as the river catchment. Ours is the Eye Brook.

The 'Eye Brook Community Heritage Project' aims to involve as many local people as possible in contributing to our knowledge of the Eye Brook area and improving our shared understanding of it. See the back page for how to get involved.

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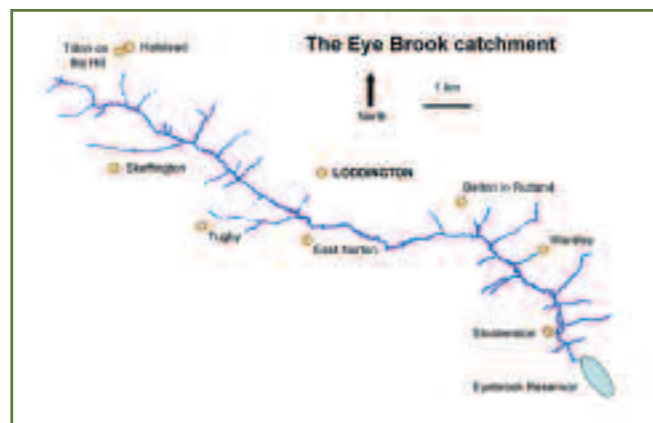
The lower Eye Brook catchment



Where is the Eye Brook?

Sharing Local Knowledge

The Eye Brook starts at Tilton on the Hill and extends southeast to Eyebrook reservoir, and then through Caldecott to join the River Welland. The 'catchment' is all the land draining into the stream, so Skeffington, Tugby, East Norton, Loddington, Belton in Rutland, Allexton, Wardley, Stockerston and Stoke Dry are all within the Eye Brook catchment.



Why 'heritage'?

Local heritage is often thought of as being part of the past, but it is also very much 'now'! It includes the landscape and features within the landscape that past and present generations have created, and the natural features and wildlife as well. How do those of us living and working in the Eye Brook area contribute to it, and how can we benefit from it? Is our heritage something to be proud of? How can we maintain and enjoy it?

What will the project do?

The project will focus on the past and present:

1. Management of land, from earliest records of agricultural settlements to nineteenth and twentieth century cropping maps and records, census data, and documented memories of local people,
2. Management and use of other natural resources such as water, woodland products and wildlife, and
3. Distribution and ecology of wild animals and plants, on land and in water

There is a lot of information 'out there' about the Eye Brook area and information is continuing to be gathered by scientists, historians and naturalists. This project aims to draw this information together so that it is more widely available to us all.

Events: There will be guided visits to sites of particular interest in the catchment and presentations on issues of local interest by local and visiting speakers (see page 8). Your ideas for guided site visits and evening talks are welcome.

The Eye: This annual publication is intended to provide an insight into the subject matter covered by the project. It includes an overview of some of the activities currently going on in the catchment. What the project achieves now depends totally on the contribution of local people such as you.

Project Summary: At the end of the four year project, a summary publication on the project will make the information gathered as widely available as possible. An important function of the summary will also be to identify gaps in our knowledge which might be filled by further work.

The villages along the length of the Eye Brook catchment, from Tilton-on-the-Hill to Caldecott, hold a treasure trove of historical information in the form of people with long memories! Such memories come from a period when life was lived closer to the land than it is today. This source of information provides a fascinating insight into the past, but much of it could also contain clues about how we might manage the land to meet today's needs. If you can help to share such local knowledge, even if only in a modest way, we would very much like to hear from you. Please contact your local history group, or Chris Stoaite using the contact details provided in this issue of 'The Eye'.



This pyramidal orchid appeared in a twelve year old woodland plantation at Loddington in 2006. This species is more usually associated with open chalk grassland!
Information: John Szczur.

Working with Schools

From 2008, this project will be forging links with local schools whose pupils come from within our area. In this way, we will be able to provide information on our cultural and natural heritage directly to children from the catchment and neighbouring areas. This will be a rare opportunity to share our collective knowledge of this area with local children.

A Natural History group from Ketton visited Tugby hay fields in the early 1950s to listen to the rasping call of the corn-crake. This migratory bird has long been extinct in England and these were probably the last to be heard in Leicestershire.
Information: Ada Ellis.
Photo: Sergy Yeliseev



This just looks like an ordinary conifer plantation beside an upper stretch of the Eye Brook, but a century ago it was a productive osier bed supplying material for basket making in Billesdon.
Information: Norman Farnsworth.

Locations of livestock drinking troughs in arable fields are a clear indication of relatively recent use of the land for pasture, reflecting the expansion of arable land in recent decades.



Summary of timing for project activities				
	2007	2008	2009	2010
Guided site visits and evening talks	•	•	•	•
History Group activities	•	•	•	•
Collection/collation of ecological information	•	•	•	•
Annual publication: <i>The Eye</i>	•	•	•	•
Working with local schools		•	•	•
Issue-based workshops			•	•
Summary publication				•

Local History Groups



Local historians within the Eye Brook catchment are active in gathering historical information about the area, including details of social history and past land use. The Rutland



History Society and the Tilton, Belton and Caldecott groups collaborating on this project are described here. *Photos courtesy of Tilton History Group.*

Tilton and District History Group

was founded in 2003, and has about fifteen active members. The main aims of the group are to investigate all aspects of the history of Tilton and the surrounding district, to encourage and support the historical interests of members, and to publish and make available information of local historical interest to a wider audience.

The group holds at least two open days a year and has published three annual journals. Recent research has included the past ironstone working and old railways in the parish, the history of village institutions such as the school and church, and oral history through interviews with older members of the community.

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Belton History Society

comprises around 20 local members as well as distance members (who have family and/or historical connections with the village). There are two main strands to the society's activities, namely literature/historical research and the oral history group. Both work in tandem within the society according to the interests of members. The Society has also published three periodical journals on the history of the area.

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Caldecott Local History Society

holds four meetings each year and all are very well supported. They are led by visiting experts, or by members of the Committee, all of whom are engaged in some area of local research. Topics are very varied, although all have a local theme and a summer outing allows members and visitors to discover first hand, a local feature of particular historical interest. New members and visitors receive a warm welcome.

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Rutland History Society

was founded in the late 1970s and now has 300 members. It is based at Rutland County Museum, Oakham, and its main objective is to promote the study of the history and archaeology of the ancient county of Rutland and its environs. The annual programme includes lecture meetings, visits, guided walks, archaeological field work, project research work and social evenings. The Society has an active publishing programme, including its annual Journal (the Rutland Record) and regular Newsletters.

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Farming our Heritage



Our local landscape consists primarily of pasture, crops and woodland. Farming has shaped this landscape for six thousand years or so. Through those millennia, the landscape has changed continuously in response to changes in farming practices. Ridge and furrow attest to the medieval use for cropping of what we now regard as 'permanent' pasture, and even 'ancient' woodland. Less than a century ago, this area was prime beef producing land, with cattle imported from Ireland being finished in the Eye Brook and Welland valleys. Since the Second World War, much of that grazing land has reverted once again to arable fields.

The history groups are gathering information on the past management of the land, for example through historical maps and census data on people employed on the land, as well as insights into the more recent past through oral histories.

Traditional skills such as hedge laying, coppicing and keeping have played an important part in shaping the character of our farmland and woodland. A better understanding of these traditional skills is likely to be essential to future management of our landscape, especially as new environmental policies come to the fore. We may have lost our village shops, but with a general resurgence of interest in local food, farms could become more important as a local source of our food.

Fishing and horse riding are important recreational activities in the area. Are we likely to see an increase in tourism locally, and what effect would that have on our local heritage?

Hedge laying

Within living memory we have seen an increase in the arable area, with a parallel increase in field and farm size. In more recent years, in response to over-production and damage to the environment, we have seen environmental objectives rise up the policy agenda.

Together with emerging policy and economic pressures, the influences of the past will no doubt continue to play a role in moulding the agricultural landscape of the future.

A view across the upper catchment





Erosion plot

The Eye Brook Community Heritage Project has been initiated by the Allerton Project, based at Loddington, but we hope that as many people as possible from throughout the catchment will contribute to it. Here is a brief summary of what the Allerton Project is all about.

The Allerton Project has been running its own farm business and research and demonstration site at Loddington since 1992. Lord and Lady Allerton were the previous owners of the farm and the project was initiated at their bequest. The project is managed by the Game Conservancy Trust and has influenced government policy, including funding for Environmental Stewardship work on farms.

The project has gathered comprehensive information on wildlife present on the farm. Numbers of many species have increased substantially since the project started. Over the past five years, research and demonstration work has extended beyond the farm boundary to include activities in the Eye Brook catchment and Leighfield Forest. For example, recent research has included a study of damage to bluebells caused by introduced muntjac deer. A survey of brown trout in the Eye Brook has revealed that, although widely distributed, numbers and breeding success are low. This is because of deposition of sediment from adjacent fields in the gravels used as spawning sites.

Soil erosion and water pollution are the subject of other research projects at Loddington and elsewhere in the catchment. Research also focuses on how to reduce loss of soil and nutrients to water by

changing cultivation methods within cropped fields. The strange metal structures that are visible from the A47 are erosion plots where some of this research is carried out.

The Allerton Project's main building is heated by an automated woodfuel boiler (supplied by Rural Energy Ltd.) with woodchip sourced from the farm's woods and from woodland on other local farms. This enables woodland management to be continued to the benefit of wildlife, while also reducing carbon emissions from fossil fuel use and providing winter work for farm staff. The farm business has recently set up a plastics recycling enterprise to enable local farmers to dispose of fertiliser bags, pesticide containers etc. in a safe and cost effective way. The aim is always for individual management practices developed at Loddington to have multiple benefits for the local environment, as well as benefits for farmers and other local people. See pages 7 & 8 for how to visit the farm.



Brown trout

In each issue of 'The Eye' we will feature local places of interest. Let us know of ideas you may have for sites to feature in the next issue.

Eyebrook Reservoir Perhaps the most obvious site associated with the Eye Brook catchment, the reservoir was built in 1940 and is an important trout fishery and wildlife habitat which is owned and managed by Corus. Much of the reservoir is exclusively for trout fishing (please contact 01536 770264 or info@eyebrook.com for details) but the shallow northern end is clearly visible from the road and an excellent place to view wintering waterfowl such as wigeon, teal, pochard and smew, as well as wading birds. Volunteer naturalists monitor bird numbers and movements through ringing, and also monitor moths and other insects.



Eye Brook Reservoir

Eye Brook Information Point The Allerton Project at Loddington has an active research programme into the ecology of streams and ponds in the Eye Brook catchment and into means of improving them (see page 6). A strong theme is research into the relationship between soil cultivation, water quality and wildlife in streams. There is now an information point at Loddington which describes this work. The display is housed in a recently restored boat-house beside two ponds set in parkland south of Loddington Hall. It is normally freely open to the public and can be reached from the East Norton road just south of Loddington village. The display will be updated from time to time with information provided by local people through this project. When visiting, please close gates and keep dogs under control as the site is grazed by sheep and managed as a wildlife area.

Eye Brook Information Point



Great Merrible Wood The wood is owned by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and is part of the Eye Brook Valley Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is a good example of modified ancient woodland with canopy, shrub and herb layers. It has a good show of bluebells and rarer plants such as helleborines and herb paris in spring. One section has ridge-and-furrow, and the flora here differs from the rest of the wood. Most of the wood is being managed with minimal intervention to encourage old trees, but coppicing has been re-introduced to some parts. The entrance is off the Horninghold to Great Easton road, about 0.5 km south-east of the cross-roads with the B664. Park on the roadside verge at SP 832959. Enter by a field gate, walk along the field (with the hedge to your left) to the next field, then across it to the wood.

Bluebells



Events

This is the programme of the main events for 2007. Check village newsletters for other events during the course of the year. Please get in touch if you have ideas for site visits, evening talks or workshops for 2008.

'The Heritage of Rutland Water'

7pm Thursday 29 March at Belton Village Hall

Robert Ovens and Sheila Sleath of Rutland History Society describe the work of local historians who have been documenting the heritage of the Rutland Water area, before, during and after the reservoir's construction, as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded project. We have much to learn from their experience as we embark on a similar project in the Eye Brook.

Visit to Launde Big Wood Sunday 13 May

Please book a place by contacting info@allertontrust.org.uk or 01572 717220.

Dr Andy Lear of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust will provide a guided tour of Launde Big Wood, a remnant of the medieval hunting forest of Leighfield and now an important site for woodland plants. This is the time to visit if you want to see them in flower. It's also an excellent opportunity to learn about how past and present management of the wood contributes to sustaining this important reserve.

Visit to The Allerton Project at Loddington Sunday 10 June

For further information, contact us at info@allertontrust.org.uk or 01572 717220.

Through its farm business and research programme, the Allerton Project is instrumental in influencing the development of environmental management on farmland nationally. Since 1992, considerable information has also been gathered on the farm's wildlife. Allerton Project staff will describe the work of the project and provide a tour of the farm.

Evening visit to Robin a Tiptoe Hill 7pm Wednesday 27 June

Peter Liddle (Leicestershire County Archaeologist) will lead a visit to this important and enigmatic feature in our local landscape. How did it get its name? Was it really a hill fort? We will discuss the place of the hill in the ancient landscape. This is a rare opportunity to explore this privately owned site and to simply enjoy the views down the valley. Access will be off the Loddington to Tilton road.

The Important Bit: What You Can Do

There are many ways in which you can contribute to the project.

- Contact your local history group or the Allerton Project to share your local knowledge (contact details are on page 4 and below).
- Search out information and documents such as photos, maps and census data relating to historical management and use of the land and other 'natural resources'.
- Provide records of past or present plant and animal species.
- Attend the events above and suggest topics that interest you for future events.
- Distribute copies of 'The Eye' and encourage others to participate in the project.

Contact details

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