



# The Eye

The annual publication of the Eye Brook Community Heritage Project

## Local Eye-identity

Many visitors to this area comment on how attractive it is. Many local people also comment on the fact that the Eye Brook area is an attractive place in which to live and work. We identify with, and are justifiably proud, of our local landscape. It is also a productive landscape, and one that has evolved over the centuries according to our changing demands on it. This second issue of The Eye explores some of these changes.

The Eye Brook Community Heritage Project aims to involve as many local people as possible in contributing to our shared knowledge of the Eye Brook area. The project is guided by a small steering group of people who live and work in the catchment. Many of the articles in this issue of The Eye are written by local people. The Eye is also designed and printed locally on part recycled paper. Comments on this issue and ideas or contributions for the

next one are welcome. Please do get involved. For details of how to, see the information on the back page.

*Eyebrook Reservoir from the east*



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# Sharing Local Knowledge

## Where is the Eye Brook?

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, Allextton, Wardley, Stockerston and Stoke Dry are all within the Eye Brook catchment.

*Arable and grassland in the lower catchment*



## What does the project do?

The project focuses 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 recent oral histories,
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.

## 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.

**If you are a teacher, and are interested in getting involved, please get in touch.**

## Food: wild and local, old and new

Most of the land around us is used for producing food, but what about the less obvious 'wild' food in our hedges, woods and other uncropped areas? 'Game' in its broadest sense, such as deer, hares and rabbits has been part of our diet for as long as humans have occupied the area. What are the issues associated with the use of such food today? We are exploring these issues through a new PhD project. If you have information or views about the use of game as food, please get in touch.

We are not just interested in meat! Most wild fruits, nuts, fungi, leaves and roots are used less today than they were in the past. We are interested in documenting and sharing knowledge about the use of such foods. With increasing interest in local food, there is also a revived interest in methods of preserving and storing wild or home grown food. If you have memories or knowledge of such methods, please get in touch.

*Red-legged partridges are available more often now than in the past.*

*Bottling home-grown fruit*

*Blackberries, always a popular wild fruit.*



# Eyebrook Wildlife



## Red Kites

It is not unusual now to see red kites soaring high above the Eye valley after an absence of nearly 150 years. Following their successful reintroduction in the 1990s when nearly a hundred birds were released in nearby Rockingham Forest, red kites have eventually spread back into the area. Although not yet seen in large numbers, that was not always the case. Reginald Haines (in 'Notes on the Birds of Rutland', 1907) quotes "the late Mr Cooper of Ayston [claiming] that it was no uncommon thing to see 20 or 30 together in the valley of the Eye".

Haines also reported that "the residents of Beaumont Chase had to protect their chickens against these birds". Red kites were considered by gamekeepers to be a threat to young pheasants and partridges and were shot on sight. "The last nest in Rutland was built in the Wardley Wood, in the south west corner near the Eye Brook", but it is believed that it produced no young. These days, these magnificent birds are more widely appreciated!

*Joe Nourish*

## What wildlife interests you?

Most people are enthused by at least one or two wildlife species. It might be house martins nesting under the eaves, a grass snake found in the garden, or a fleeting glimpse of a kingfisher on the Eye Brook. It might be barn owls or buzzards, otters or orthoptera. Let us know what wildlife interests you. Share your knowledge of local wildlife or suggest species that we should investigate.

## Familiar flowers and alien deer

Rare woodland plants and more familiar species such as bluebells have thrived in our local woods as a result of their management and productive use over the centuries. This management took the form of thinning and coppicing to

produce timber and smaller material for hedging and hurdles. More recently, this traditional management has been replaced by targeted management, exclusively for conservation purposes. Since the 1970s, a new influence on woodland plants has been the spread of alien muntjac deer which eat them. Muntjac were introduced into southeast England in the 1880s and are now widespread across the country and often numerous.



*Bluebells and hazel coppice*

An assessment of damage to bluebells recently carried out in local woods by the Allerton Project reveals that no woods are affected significantly more than others. However, there are influences within woods which affect the level of damage. This boils down to the occurrence of shrubby cover in the base of the wood. This is a natural development following thinning of woodland, whether for production of woodland products or for conservation purposes, but it seems the shrubs provide excellent cover for muntjac which then graze adjacent plants. This is something of a conservation dilemma. If you have views on this issue, please get in touch.

# Land Use History

## Allextion – land use change through the Millennium

The Domesday survey reported that Allextion had two manors, one of which was described as largely waste; waste was essential to a thriving rural economy for villagers to rear their sheep and pigs. This common land provided villagers with bracken, rabbits and wood for fuel. Such common pasture was well established before the Normans. Where trees had been cleared, land was good for grazing, and although the soil was clay, it was also good enough for arable. The Domesday survey reported that Allextion had two communal ploughs, with another in the Lord's demesne. Enough grain was produced to support two mills, one of which continued in use until the 20th century. Allextion was part of the Royal Forest and home to a Royal Forester until the clearance of woodland and waste which occurred between 950 and 1350 brought farming to the fore. During good times the land was ploughed high up the hillsides.

At first, peasant farmers managed an open field arable system but sheep farming expanded as the price of wool rose from the 13th century. Allextion was already prosperous enough for St Peter's Church to be built and improved in the 12th century. By 1350 there were around 40 households in the parish. The Black Death in 1348 brought a retreat from marginal arable land but by the time of the 1378 Poll Tax survey, Allextion still had 49 villagers, presumably each with a family. So, through the medieval period, the natural vegetation of native trees gave way to arable land up to the mid 14th century, and this then gave way to pasture.



St Peter's Church at Allextion

Allextion was the first of the parishes in the Eyebrook to be enclosed. By 1555, all fields were enclosed mostly for grazing, but in neighbouring Stockerston enclosure did not start until 1570. While the villages of Allextion and

Stockerston survived enclosure, nearby Holyoake was abandoned and became one of Leicestershire's many deserted villages. Through the 17th century, landowners were rationalising and consolidating their estates and the papers of the Verney family illustrate how land was used for wealth-holding and collateral for loans. Later in the 18th century, the Allextion estate was sold to the Wilson family and one of the leaseholders of the Hall was the Hotchkin family who made their fortune on plantations in Jamaica.



*Evidence of medieval open field system beside Allextion Wood*

At the beginning of the 19th century William and John Sewell ran the largest farms, about 150 acres each, while the Rector of Allextion had a glebe of 26 acres. Many of the villagers had little more than homesteads. There were some 12 farmers or graziers in the parish, the remaining 8 dwellings being largely tied cottages held by agricultural labourers. At the end of the century the Hall was occupied by George Pauling, director of a railway company, who used it as a hunting lodge.

Following the Napoleonic Wars, agriculture experienced a great depression, though grazing areas suffered less than arable. Allextion had less than 100 of its 1000 acres in arable. However many had to sell stock for little more than the cost of feed and tenant farmers sought rent reductions. By 1928, only 38 of the 1027 acre Allextion Estate were arable. The arable area didn't expand substantially until after the Second World War when the move to our current farming system began.

*Vivian Anthony*

A fuller version of this article is available from the author at [vsa@webleicester.co.uk](mailto:vsa@webleicester.co.uk), who would welcome additional information about Allextion.

# Land Use History



*This photo of agricultural workers on a 1,500 acre farm in the 1920s is thought to have been taken somewhere between Market Harborough and Caldecott. Please contact us if you know more about it.*

*Source: Market Harborough Museum*

## **Caldecott agriculture – a very brief history**

As with many ancient settlements, Caldecott's position has been determined and defined by the landscape, and archaeological and botanical evidence points to very early occupation. During Roman occupation, improved roads and a paved ford allowed wagons to cross the river; whilst the village itself provided a stopping place for drovers, merchants, or small military groups. With these improvements, the agricultural work rate could be increased and larger areas managed with greater ease. With garrisons to feed and an expanding stronghold at Leicester, the Romans demanded a more intensive approach to farming.

They brought with them methods of reinforcing wooden tools with iron and more specialist tools, such as the scythe. They encouraged the breeding of better livestock and introduced methods of drying grain for winter storage.

As Roman political domination decreased the community developed its own distinct identity and medieval records give us a clear picture of a well-populated, productive farming community, using individual strips of land in common fields, ploughed in the characteristic ridge and furrow. The flood plain of the River Welland offered seasonal pastures and enabled local communities to keep cattle, sheep and poultry.

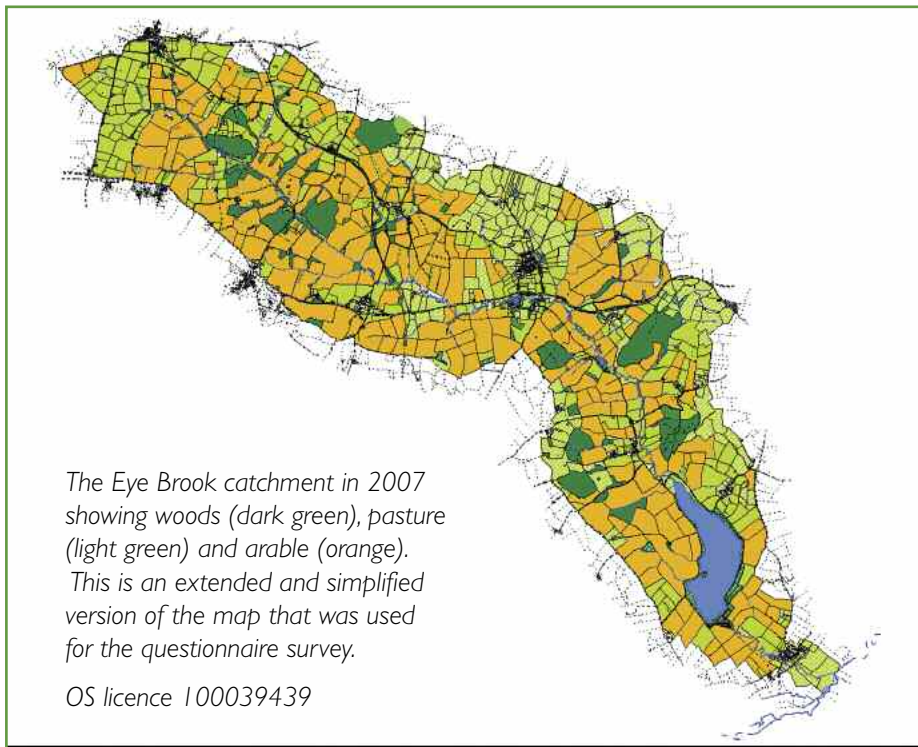
From the 13th to 16th centuries, the Bishop of Lincoln was often in residence at Lyddington and both his lifestyle and that of his large retinue was supported by rent paid in cash and in kind to the Bishopric. The fact that the Welland was still navigable from Stamford to the Wash allowed surpluses to be sold to other Bishoprics and estates. After the Reformation, rents continued to be paid, but to the Crown. Areas of land were gradually being enclosed, but the Enclosure Act applying to Lyddington, Caldecott and Uppingham

was one of the last to be passed, in 1799.

The area continues to provide good pasture for cattle and sheep and higher ground provides arable cropping. As late as the 1940's, about a quarter of the available land was required to produce the oats and hay needed to fuel the main source of motive power – farm horses. In the first half of the 20th century, a 1500 acre farm employed around 50 men and 30 horses, but today an equivalent acreage can be managed with two men and a seasonal assistant. What was once a gregarious occupation, providing most of the community with a lifetime of employment, has become a solitary one. The landscape remains, only the people are gone.

*John Reynolds*

# The Future Landscape?



The questionnaire also provided some useful background information on the community in this part of the catchment. For example, 36% of the people had been living in the area for less than 10 years and only 6% have been here for 60 years or more. Those who are involved in farming are the ones who have been here the longest. People generally considered their local community to be the village and parish in which they lived, rather than immediate neighbours or wider regional scale.

## Questionnaire survey results

As elsewhere in lowland England, farmland in the Eye Brook area is under new pressures. These are driven by a revival in the fortunes of arable farming associated with increases in world crop prices, and an increasing need to meet environmental objectives. Market forces are driven by food shortages worldwide, but also by increasing demand for biofuels, while environmental considerations are largely associated with objectives for wildlife and improved water quality.

In the summer, residents in the upper part of the catchment were invited to express their views about future landscape change through a questionnaire survey in which four options were presented in map form. It is important to stress that these are not scenarios that anyone is proposing! The options were:

1. Continuation of current land use without set-aside
2. Relatively minor changes to that land use to improve water quality in the stream (e.g. buffer strips, some conversion of arable to grass and woodland planting)
3. Increased production of biofuels such as biodiesel from oilseed rape and woodchip from short rotation willow coppice in order to combat climate change, and
4. A 'rewilding' scenario in which woodland 'corridors' are created on farmed land and agricultural activity is substantially reduced

However, most comments about change in the local community or landscape concerned the villages (e.g. increased house building, increased occupation of those houses by people working outside the area etc), rather than the wider rural area around villages.

There were interesting attitudes to the landscape scenarios. People who had links with farming favoured scenarios 1 and 3 which concentrate on cropping, while other residents tended to favour the other scenarios, with the rewilding scenario being favoured by more than half of residents with no agricultural background. There were differences here as well though. There was general agreement around the favoured scenarios amongst older residents, but amongst those under 55 there were differences between male and female respondents. Men favoured rewilding, while women favoured a land use scenario driven by a need to reduce carbon emissions. This carbon-based land use also seemed to be considered of greater benefit to the community as a whole than rewilding or other scenarios. These answers provide an interesting insight into our collective attitudes to land use change in future.

*This article is a summary of work carried out by Mark Amos as part of his MSc project with Imperial College London. Many thanks to the 120 people who returned a completed questionnaire.*

# Wind Power

## Tilton Windmill

There is new interest in wind as a renewable energy resource, but the highest point in the catchment was for many years the site for our local windmill. This was located close to the Melton Road out of Tilton and was about 50 metres



*The Tilton windmill in about 1910, with the miller, William Large, in the doorway.*

from the mill house where the miller and his family lived. The site is about 200 metres above sea level, with ground sloping away to the east, enhancing the speed of the wind.

The mill was a 'post mill' in which the main wooden structure can be rotated on a central post to face the wind. This manual alignment of the mill with the wind was done using a tailpole at the rear of the mill and was a considerable skill. The main structure of the mill sat on a brick roundhouse which would have been used for storage. The four sails consisted of a wooden lattice covered by sailcloth

or canvas which was furled when the mill was not in use. The mill is thought to have housed two pairs of mill stones, the resulting flour being bagged on the floor below. An extension to the mill appears to have been added at some stage to house a 'dresser' for removing bran in the production of white flour. How long there was a mill on the site is unclear but it was listed in the 1839 Enclosure Award and stopped operating in about 1910. The mill was dismantled in 1926.

Still surviving at Halstead House Farm is the gearing for another 'wind engine' which was installed in the 1860s and which was used for rolling oats, chopping root crops and chaff, and grinding cereals for pigs, as well as flour production. The engine was also used for hoisting sacks and pumping water. The sails were destroyed in a gale in the 1890s but the main gearing continued to be used until the 1940s with other sources of power based on fossil fuels.

*The information in this piece is drawn from an article by Edward Davis which first appeared in the Tilton History Group Journal, Issue 2, and an article by John Driver in Issue 3.*

## Water Mills

There are likely to have been more water mills than windmills in the area but there is little information available about them. If you have information relating to water mills along the Eye Brook please let us know. We would also be interested to hear about other uses of the stream and its water, such as the use of hydraulic rams and wells.

## Field names

Field names often tell a story of past use. "First Mushroom Field" and "Second Mushroom Field" in the upper part of the catchment once produced such an abundance of field mushrooms that the passing train would slow to a crawling pace so that passengers could get out and help themselves! If you know of any interesting field names in this area, please let us know about them.

*Information: John Wood*



*Modern wind turbine at Tilton*

# Events

**This is the programme of main events for 2008. Check village newsletters and notice boards 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 2009. For further details about the events below and to book a place, please contact Natalie Augusztynyi on 01572 717220 or [naugusztynyi@gct.org.uk](mailto:naugusztynyi@gct.org.uk)

## **'The history of Allexton' Wednesday 6 February, Allexton Church (evening talk)**

Vivian Anthony will present the results of his exhaustive research into the history of Allexton. This evening talk provides a fascinating insight into the development of the village and the characters (worthy and otherwise) who have influenced it.

## **Visit the former residents of Belton Saturday 19 April**

Belton historian, Audrey Walker, will lead a tour of Belton houses and introduce us to their occupants of more than a century ago. Although they are unlikely to be in, we will learn about their occupations and lifestyles and how these compare with those of today.

## **Visit Eyebrook Reservoir Saturday 24 May, Eyebrook Reservoir Fishing Lodge**

A rare opportunity to go behind the scenes of our local reservoir and learn about its past and present management, and the wildlife associated with it, all recorded by local enthusiasts.

## **Visit Snelston medieval village Wednesday 11 June (evening visit)**

Following on from his interesting and entertaining tour of Robin-a-Tiptoe hill in 2007, County Archaeologist, Peter Liddle will lead a tour of the privately owned deserted village of Snelston on the edge of the Eye Brook catchment (north of Caldecott).

*Visit to Robin a Tiptoe Hill in 2007.*



## **The Important Bit: What You Can Do**

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

- Contact your local history society or the Allerton Project to share your local knowledge.
- 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 listed on this page and suggest topics for future events.
- Distribute copies of 'The Eye' and encourage others to participate in the project.



### **Contact details**

Dr Chris Stoate  
The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust  
Allerton Project, Loddington,  
Leicestershire LE7 9XE

**T** 0116 259 7609  
**www** [cstoate@gct.org.uk](mailto:cstoate@gct.org.uk)

### **Steering Group:**

Chris Stoate (Project Co-ordinator), Jim Auterson,  
Roger Marshall, Joe Nourish, David Walker:

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0116 259 9955  
[inspiration@soarvalleypress.co.uk](mailto:inspiration@soarvalleypress.co.uk)