

Bathampton Meadows Historic Environment Character Area Assessments

Bathampton Meadows can be divided into several areas or compartments each with a varying character, deriving largely from historic and present use. The meadows have been quite widely defined for this study. Effectively the areas included are those that were, in origin, flood plain and have not been built on and areas just above the flood plain but currently pasture or meadow continuous with those lower areas. Areas that were historically meadows but have been built over or otherwise significantly altered are noted, but are not considered part of the meadows for BMA purposes.

We should be aware that there is a false dichotomy between natural and historic environment. All of the British landscape has been moulded by human activity, sometimes subtly, sometimes more obviously. Nonetheless, it is useful to distinguish the natural environment as the present vegetable and animal make up and the supporting soil, geology and hydrology. The historic environment is often taken to mean buildings and other man-made structures, but it is also true that almost everything about the environment came about through human agency. A hedged field is both natural in that it is a growing, living thing and historic as it is the direct result of human agency: so is a nature reserve. Bathampton Manor is part of the historic environment and its garden is both. Grassland is maintained either by grazing or by mowing. The AWT wetland is a human creation.

On this analysis, Bathampton Meadows are part of the historic environment but are also a natural environment of great value and significance.

Character areas. These are areas that share significant properties and the following areas are suggested.

1. The Batheaston side of the river, east of the Toll Bridge

This divides into sub-areas:

- A. the overgrown wooded area south-east of the car park. This has limited development at the former petrol station/car sales site and at Avonside Apartments
- B. the car park
- C. Secret Garden
- D. the footpath and lower parts of the gardens of the properties between there and the Toll Bridge.

These are not really part of the meadows as we understand them now, although historically they occupy the edge of the flood plain which on this side of the river up to the toll bridge is quite narrow. They could not realistically be managed in the way we might wish for the meadows, but are not really under threat (except

from river erosion: an old course of the river can be seen on Google Earth satellite photographs suggesting that the bend has moved about 100m north-east from an earlier position of unknown date and works torevet the bank along the length south-west of the car park seem to be frequent).

A footpath runs from the car park past the Secret Garden and along the river bank to the Batheaston Mill and then to the Toll Bridge. It passes under the Tollbridge roadway and links to the old ferry staithe. This footpath is mapped in 1884 and continues across Area 2 and 3, joining the present cyclepath under the bypass bridge and continuing to meet London Road West north of Lambridge House. It is marked as a Public Right of Way on the B&NES website.

Heritage Assets

Heritage assets can be designated (WHS, listed, scheduled or a conservation area) or non-designated (heritage value recognised in some way but without a legal status, e.g. locally listed or on the Historic Environment Record or HER).

This area west of the city/Batheaston boundary and north of the river falls into the World Heritage Site. Not all of the items inside a WHS necessarily contribute to the significance of the Site. The value here comes from the settings aspect as described above.

Listed Buildings/structures

The south-east and north-east boundary walls of the Secret Garden are Listed Grade II (probably early 18th century)

Toll bridge and Booth. Listed Grade II (1870s)

Avondale House (early 19th century) and Brewery (mid 19th century) are also listed. Latter is a visible presence from the meadows, the former much less so.

Significance

The value, or significance of this area is that it provides a semi rural, open edge to the river forming a soft boundary to the meadows on the Bathampton side. This is reinforced by the gardens it fringes, running gently uphill. It also provides a pedestrian, traffic-free route from Stambridge to the toll bridge and beyond.

2. The Batheaston side of the river, south-west of the Toll Bridge

This consists of a series of fields and hedged enclosures, including the Archery Club butts and the Avon Rugby Club. This is grassland, in effect "improved" meadow. Other, less managed parts between the riverside fields and the gardens and new development south-east of London Road, are mowed grass in danger of reverting to scrubby grassland. They have been used as pasture for horses. A footpath runs from just north-west of the Toll Bridge booth to the old ferry staithe opposite Bathampton Mill and as described for Area 1, across the butts and Rugby ground, to the bypass and beyond. The fields are screened from the river by dense wooded planting.

Listed Buildings/structures

There are no listed buildings in this part of the meadows. Some older houses along London Road West are heritage assets. They are unlikely to reach the threshold of listing.

Significance

Despite its varied and largely non agricultural uses, this area is a vital part of the green tongue extending into Bath, adding to the openness of the meadows here. It also strengthens the sense of separation of Batheaston from Bath, even though the London Road's old ribbon development damages this impression from the street side. Infill development towards the road is already weakening this significance.

3. The Batheaston side of the river south-west of the by-pass

The floodplain is interrupted by a spur of higher land reaching nearly to the river and utilised by the bypass as an approach to the river crossing. This slopes down to the south-west to the Rugby Club training ground at Lambridge. The garden/grounds of Lambridge House occupy the lower part of this slope. At the Rugby ground the Lam Brook flows down to the river and the flood plain resumes, or more accurately the river moves eastward. The Lam or Lamb brook has been straightened, presumably when the training ground was laid out.. Previously, it meandered its way across the site of the Rugby Ground

The pre-development north-western edge of the flood plain is marked here by the London Road. This is of Roman origin, turnpiked in the 18th century and is placed here precisely because it was above the flood zone.

The flood plain continues in a wide zone between the river and road down to Morrison's supermarket, but a large part is occupied by Grosvenor Place, Ringswell Gardens and Mews and the gardens and some recent development behind Kensington Place. The riverward half is partly meadow (Kensington Meadows) and partly wooded. A footpath runs along the river side from Grosvenor Bridge to Morrisons. South of Morrison's, the flood plain on this side continues to Cleveland bridge but is almost complete built over and narrows as the river moves west again. The river side is heavily wooded.

Grosvenor Place and the area behind was planned as pleasure gardens and fashionable housing in the 1790s. The gardens were laid out but were short-lived. The area behind the houses reverted to market gardens and then was built on in the 1960s onwards.

Observations during the renewal of the riverside collector sewer back in the 1990s showed that Kensington Meadows had been raised by several metres by the dumping of rubbish in the 19th and perhaps early 20th centuries.

Listed Buildings/structures

Lambridge House is listed Grade II (early and later 18th century)
The terraces along London Road are all Listed, mostly Grade II but Grosvenor Place is listed Grade I (late 18th and early 19th centuries)

Significance

Although much altered from its earlier agricultural/horticultural state, this is an important element of the openness of the green tongue and contributes to the overall unity of the meadows on the other side of the river. It provides a green pedestrian access via the footpath from Morrisons, through Kensington Meadows and over the Grosvenor bridge to Area 5 and onwards and the canal.

4. The Bathampton side of the river north and east of the by-pass not including the AWT site

This is and 7 are the core of the meadows as most people probably see them. This is because they are the largest section easily visible and accessible. Before the railway this formed one managed agricultural landscape. These are ancient meadows, for a period in the 18th and into the 19th century, managed water meadows. Traces of the water management system and what appear to be managed spring-fed streams are visible but have not been mapped or studied. They seem to include canalised streams draining into the Avon, often dry in the summer.

The whole area of the meadows was clearly enclosed by parliamentary agreement. This can be deduced from the field pattern on the 1848 Tithe Map, although I have found no documentary evidence. This enclosure took place after 1750 when the area was mapped on the Ralph Allen estate map and before 1848. This is the heyday of parliamentary enclosure. The present fragmentary field boundaries are clearly the remnants of the enclosure process and pre-date the railway (late 1830s). The fields were essentially unchanged when mapped in 1884, but by then the canal and railways had cut across them. This part of the canal was constructed in 1804.

East of Mill Lane the land is managed pasture. There is now a wide surfaced path along the river side from the new bridge over the river at Stambridge turning along Mill Lane just north of the track and footpath to Grosvenor. This has a stock-proof fence separating it from the rest of the meadows. The south-eastern corner has been turned into the AWT nature reserve (Area 8).

From the west of Mill Lane, to the Horler's farm, they are managed meadow on land that has been artificially raised by dumping from the bypass construction but now reclaimed as agricultural land. The original ground level is that of the track from Mill Lane to the farm and it rises by about three metres by the new road. The river bank is largely bare of trees north-east of Mill Lane and lightly wooded south-west of Bathampton Manor. Both areas are getting a little more wooded.

North of the meadow land nearer the river the land is in three distinct uses.

Bathampton Manor and its heavily wooded gardens, now a residential care home; an abandoned orchard which seems now to be part of the bee research station of Bath University but was clearly part of the garden of the manor house; and a camping and caravan site, which I presume to be part of the Horler's holiday facilities. This is meadow when not used for visitors.

The footpath from Mill Lane past the Horler's farm has been diverted to pass under the bypass bridge. It used to run fairly directly to the path between the Grosvenor Suspension Bridge (as was, the current bridge is a more recent replacement) and Cremorne Gardens where it passes under the railway and rises up to join the canal towpath. There was a branch to Meadow Farm and the bridge over the canal. This has also been diverted under the bypass and around the old field boundaries to connect to the canal bridge.

Listed Buildings/structures

Bathampton Manor (17th and 18th centuries) and Bathampton Mill (1818) are grade II listed. The weir and remains of the mill proper at the latter are also "curtilage" listed, that is, listed by association.

Meadow Farmhouse is Grade II listed (1826)

Significances

This is dealt with at the end of Area 6 when 4, 5 and 6 are discussed together.

5. Bathampton south-west of the bypass to Grosvenor bridge

These are ancient meadows, for a period in the 18th and into the 19th century managed water meadows. Essentially part of the same landscape as 4, cut off by the bypass embankment. From the bypass westward they are managed pasture, This area still retains physical evidence of the water meadows management systems, canalised spring-fed streams and the enclosure field boundaries. A footpath links Area 4 from beneath the bypass bridge to the canal at Meadow Farm and further west at Grosvenor bridge.

6. The meadows south of the railway and west of the river

This was pasture and meadow, enclosed as described in Area 4. The pattern has been much altered by the Weymouth/Portsmouth branch line, the Jewson's Builders Yard, now redeveloped as housing, and the King Edward's playing fields. The latter are set within the curve of the canal and old field boundaries although the internal ones have been removed. Despite this, the area is still predominantly grassland pasture and meadow and the canal and railway have mellowed to become part of the character. The housing is now somewhat jarring, but is built on what was technically brownfield land.

Listed Buildings/structures

Bridge over the canal in Bathampton Village; Grade II (1804)

Other heritage assets in the villages are not further noted.

Beyond the meadows in Bathford, just over the river, we can note Bathford Bridge over the Bybrook, a scheduled monument dating to 1665.

Significances

These Areas are the historic meadow and pasture of Bathampton Parish, the settlement (*tun*) at the *hamm* or “meadow in the river bend”. Grosvenor Bridge marks the western end of the parish along the river. The field boundaries, such as remain, are those of the enclosure which clearly pre-dated the canal and presumably took place in the later 18th century. The tithe map shows these parcels still largely pasture although some had turned to arable by that date. Such usage had probably begun in the Napoleonic Wars and was probably ended with the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846. There is thus an historic significance in the “fabric” of the meadows, the physical evidence of their past uses.

They also form the largest part of the green tongue, the open space forming an important part of the setting of the World Heritage Site of Bath. It also forms the local core of the surrounding hills of the Cotswold AONB. This is an important recreational space for the people of the surrounding communities especially as a corridor for walking into and out of town or as a circular route across the canal and river linking both sides of the latter.

The main significance is as a lightly wooded pastoral (grassland) landscape with historic boundaries (hedgerows) and access routes (footpaths) separating the three villages and providing a green wedge into the eastern edge of Bath.

7. The AWT site at the east end of the meadows north of the by-pass

A totally artificial natural environment! This had its origins, I believe, in the flood alleviation compensation works related to the construction of the bypass. This and the development of the nature reserve has provided an important wildlife site but has much altered, indeed it can be argued, destroyed the character of the meadows here. The wood and scrub cover has of course changed and there is an artificial wetland and secondary lake or pond around the artificial oxbow lake. The balance between the benefits of the reserve and its impact on the character of the meadows has to be carefully considered.

8. The road and railway corridor.

The London-Bristol GWR railway was put through in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Its cuttings and embankments are environments largely free of human activity and thus ideal for some kinds of flora and fauna. The branch to Salisbury was completed here in 1857 as the Somerset, Wiltshire and Weymouth Railway. The road, built in 1993-4, cuts destructively across the flood plain and river as it sweeps eastwards from Swainswick, but its embankments and cuttings are likewise rich in tree and plant cover and provide a haven for wildlife that can adapt

to the peculiar environment created. Apart from the river crossing and from the Mill Lane bridge, the road is largely hidden from the meadows. Its main impact now is probably noise.

Listed Buildings/structures

The railway was on the tentative list of World Heritage Sites for some years. I am not sure if it still is or has been withdrawn. It is a heritage asset and many elements of it are Listed.

Bridge over the railway by Meadow Farm, original c.1840 GWR bridge: Grade II

Bridge over the canal by Meadow Farm, c. 1804: Grade II

Mill Lane overbridge; original, c.1840 GWR bridge: Grade II

Bradford Road underbridge; original, c.1840 GWR bridge: Grade II

Capacity for Change

Capacity for change is limited in most areas, if we are to avoid damaging their significances. The meadows main characteristic is as grassland with scattered trees and hedgerows and seasonal watercourses and their relationship to the river. This is maintained by grazing and mowing and hedgerow maintenance. Relatively slight changes such as the access track to the nature reserve (leaving aside the impact of the reserve itself) and the riverside/Mill Lane cycle and footpath and its poorly designed river crossing are nibbling away at the character and show the potential dangers of incremental change without an overall vision. The cycle path near the river crossing is already acquiring the character of a small park. Its relatively large scale has already attracted attempts to drive and camp on it!

The areas of grassland in Areas 4 and 6 are already cut up into small areas by lanes, tracks, railways: the transport infrastructure of various periods. Change should be aimed at increasing the re-integration of these areas rather than splitting them up further by transport corridors (e.g. Sustrans standard cycle paths) that do not take this aspiration into account. A footpath links and unifies the area it passes through: a cycle track can divide it if over engineered.

This does not mean that improved pedestrian access with more linked up footpaths, for example, cannot be considered, nor that cycle routes or some sort of disabled access should be ruled out. These would have to take account of the character and significances of the meadows as a whole and in detail. In particular, there is a danger in treating the meadows as a through route rather than its own place, with its remarkable feeling of isolation from the urban and semi-urban that is quite close by. It provides a transition from town to country, but it is a destination and a haven more than a passage.

Powered vehicular access must be severely limited, essentially only to necessary farming and nature reserve reasons.

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