



*Ampfield, Hampshire*

*June 1992*

*The Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area is a beautiful area of unspoilt countryside in the parishes of Ampfield, Hursley, Otterbourne, North Baddesley and Romsey Extra.*

*It is my hope that this publication will lead to a greater appreciation of this ancient landscape. Many of the sites of wildlife or historical importance can be seen by walking the network of public footpaths in the Area.*

*The Steering Group is working to conserve and enhance the Heritage Area so that future generations will continue to enjoy this unique part of Hampshire* ❧

**Miss J Cornwell**

*Chairman of the Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area Steering Group*

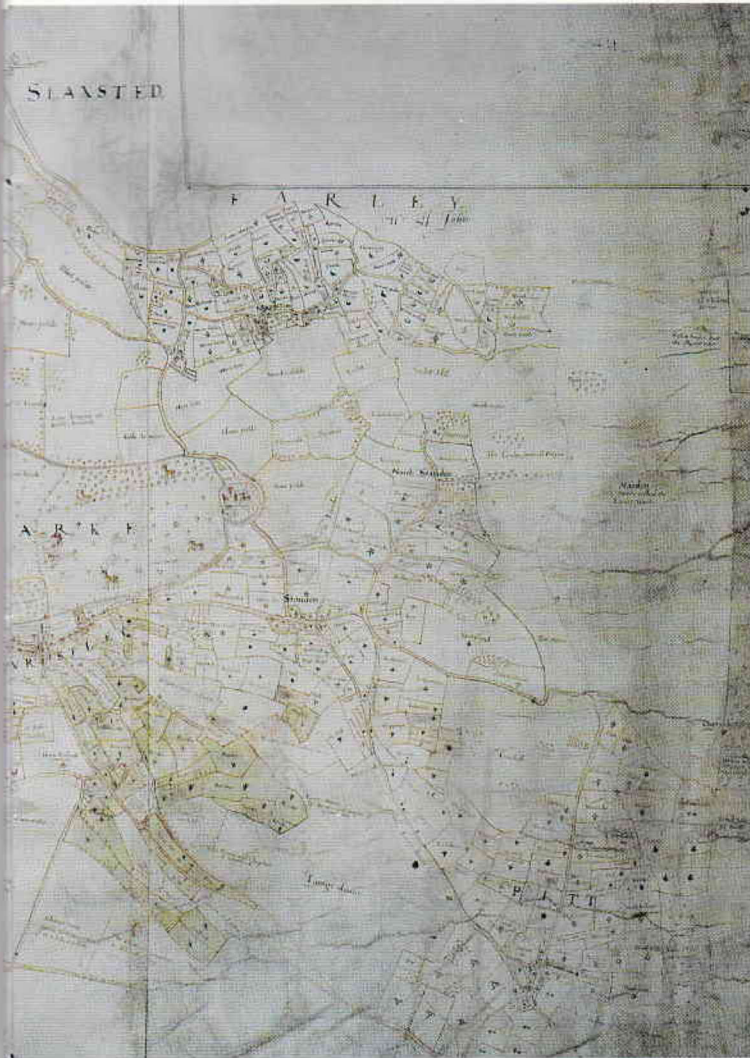


The small livestock farms are characterised by irregular-shaped fields bounded by mature hedges of Hazel, Hawthorn and Oak. The farmland around Ratlake is a good example of this historic landscape and includes Ratlake Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest. When this field pattern was evolving, the parts of the Heritage Area west and south of Amplefield were relatively unsettled common land



*The 1588 map of Hursley and Ampfield parishes.*

## Commonland and Enclosure



Before enclosure, in the first few years of the nineteenth century, large parts of the Heritage Area were common land, grazed by commoners' stock. The commons of Ampfield, Cranbury and North Baddesley once formed part of a vast tract of heathland that stretched down to the coast at Millbrook, now in Southampton. The area must have looked as parts of the New Forest look today. Remnants of this New Forest type habitat survive at Emer Bog.

Enclosure of the commons and their improvement for agriculture resulted in the destruction of much of this heathland. The open landscape changed to one of straight roads and square fields lined by hawthorn hedges. The best example of this 'planned' landscape is to be found just outside the Heritage Area at Warren Farm, North Baddesley ■



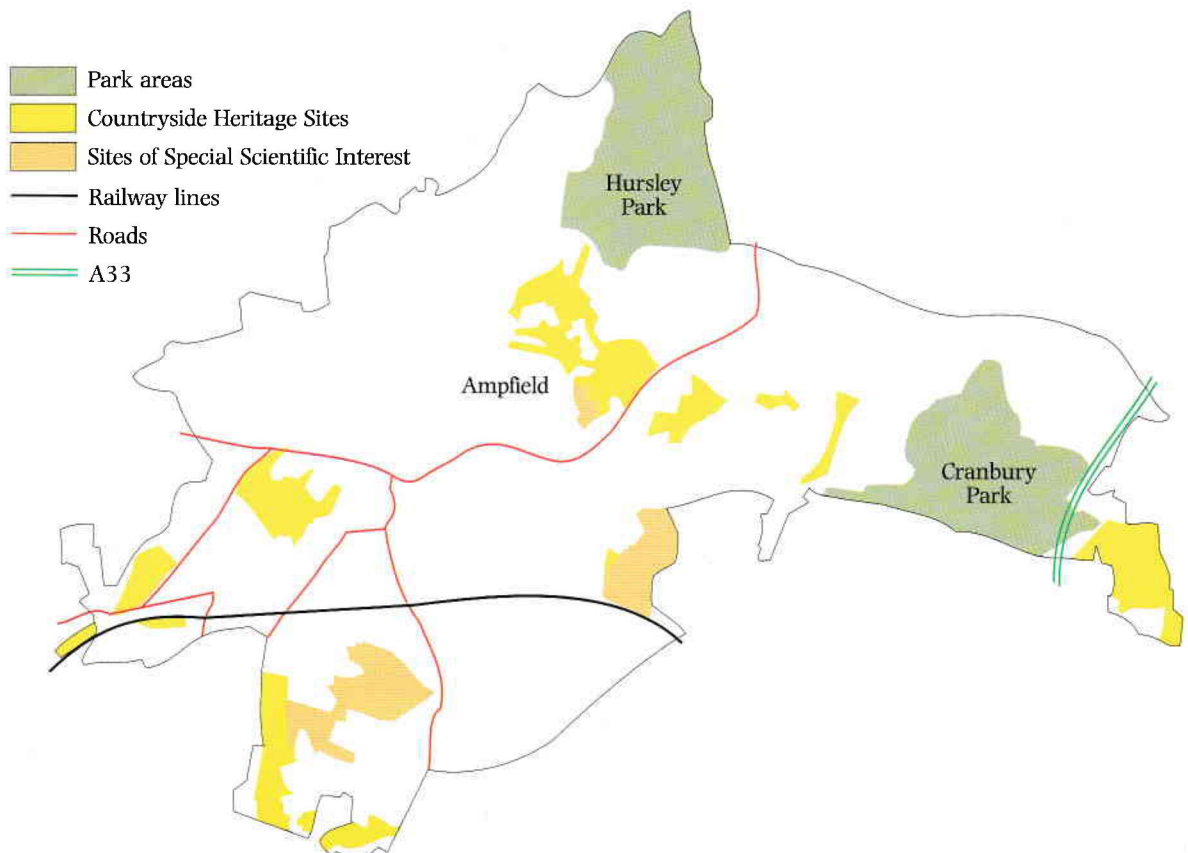
## Settlement Pattern

At the southern tip of the Heritage Area is North Baddesley. Here is the church of the Knights Hospitallers of St John, near Body Farm where, legend says, the body of William Rufus rested for the night on its way to Winchester and London.

Throughout the Heritage Area there is a fairly even distribution of dwellings that have survived from the 1600s. Old maps show a progression from scattered

communities to villages, though the lost villages of Merton and Silkstead testify to varying fortunes. Many field boundaries and roads are still in place 400 years on.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been a rapid sprawl of new settlements on the former commons. North Baddesley and Chandlers Ford were built almost entirely on heathland commons ■



## The Parks of Hursley and Cranbury

The eastern end of the Heritage Area is dominated by Cranbury and Hursley Parks.

In Hursley Park there is the site of Merton where at various times stood a fort, a manor and village, and later a medieval castle.

Merton Castle was one of six castles built by King Stephen's half brother, Bishop Henry De Blois, for defence in the wars between Stephen and Matilda. Later the castle became a hunting lodge for the Bishops of Winchester. In the 1400s, the castle was in such a ruinous state that it was abandoned in favour of a new wooden hunting 'logge', close to the site of the present Hursley House.

This 'logge' lasted up to the middle 1550s, when Edward VI granted Merton to Sir Philip Hoby, and a Tudor Lodge was built. This building saw many people come and go, including Richard Cromwell, son of the Lord Protector, Oliver. Under his family, the estate's fortunes declined and in 1718 Richard's two surviving daughters sold the estate

to Sir William Heathcote: the first of five generations to live in his new house, now the centre section of the present building.

Cranbury Park's history is similar to that of Hursley Park, starting as an Iron Age hill fort. In Tudor times a large house was built on the site, the leasehold belonging to the Bishop of Winchester. It was sold to Sir Charles Wyndham in 1665, who sold it to John Conduit, whose wife was the niece and heiress of Isaac Newton. She eventually sold the estate to Thomas Dummer, who bequeathed the estate to his friend, William Chamberlain in 1781. The present house dates from this time and the Park is still owned by his descendants. In the Park there is a 'folly'; part of Netley Abbey was dismantled and rebuilt around 1770, but never completed, after a fatal accident caused the workmen to believe they were invoking the wrath of God in desecrating one of His great churches ■



## A Golden Age?

The history of a large part of the Ampfield Heritage Area is described by Charlotte Yonge in *John Keble's Parishes*. In her view Hursley and Ampfield went through a Golden Age when Sir William Heathcote acceded to the baronetcy and took up residence at Hursley Park in 1835. Sir William brought his former tutor, John Keble, to the Hursley vicarage. Keble's presence there made the parish a centre of English church life until his death in 1866. There were visits from such eminent churchmen as Dr Pusey, Dr J M Neale, Reverend Butler, Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand and from nearer at hand Bishop Sumner of Winchester and Dr Moberly, Headmaster of Winchester College. Living in the 1990s it is difficult, perhaps, to appreciate the fervour of religion in those times and the intense interest in religious controversy. However, we still have visible signs of the Church revival: the building of new churches at Otterbourne in 1838, Ampfield in 1841 and the renovations at Hursley Church in 1848. These churches were handsomely planted with trees, and at that time all aspects of natural life of field and hedgerow were closely observed. In 1851 Keble wrote a poem to *the Lord of the Manor* of Merton against 'High Farming' and the threat of the felling of a copse of trees on Ladwell Hill. The beautiful woods of oak and beech on the way to Ampfield, such as Petty Priest Copse and Nevil's Copse, he referred to as 'Hursley Cathedral' ■

## Roads and Railways

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There is evidence of the early transport network in the Heritage Area in a well-preserved section of Roman road in Otterbourne Park Wood. The road ran from Winchester to a (probable) ferry crossing of the River Itchen at South Stoneham.

The present A31 from Winchester to Romsey has its origins as a turnpike road built in the middle of the eighteenth century. There were turnpike gates at Hursley and Romsey. The new road was described in 1767 as 'everywhere

broad enough for three carriages to pass each other, with an even edge of grass the whole way, it has more the appearance of an elegant gravel walk than of a high-road'.

The railway linking Romsey to Eastleigh was built in the middle of the nineteenth century by the London and South Western Railway Company. As a boy, the Reverend Awdry watched steam trains passing on this line: surely the inspiration for his *Thomas the Tank Engine* series of children's books ■





## Nature Conservation

The long continuity of traditional management and slow rate of change within the Heritage Area ensured the survival of a great diversity of habitats and wildlife.

The centre-piece is Ampfield Wood: a 300 hectare block of woodland derived from ancient coppices, a deer park and common land. Much of the woodland was converted to plantations earlier in the present century but the remaining semi-natural areas and rides support a rich variety of wildlife. One very

special tree grows in the wood: the Small-leaved Lime. This species is a survivor from ancient times. It had become uncommon by the Roman period and is now confined to a few ancient woodlands. In Ampfield Wood it grows in almost pure stands of coppice.

The grassy rides throughout Ampfield Wood provide sources of nectar for many species of butterfly including the scarce Marsh Fritillary and Silver-washed Fritillary. A comprehensive conservation plan

has been prepared and implemented by the Forestry Commission to coppice Lime, control invasive Rhododendron and manage the rides for butterflies.

Close to Ampfield Wood are many small meadows with a field pattern that has not changed significantly since the 1588 Hursley map was surveyed. These ancient meadows have never been affected by artificial fertilisers or herbicides and support an impressive display of wild flowers in the summer months.

Lousewort, Water Avens, Devil's-bit Scabious, Sneezewort and Southern Marsh Orchid are some of the more conspicuous species.

The greatest obvious change in the Area over the last two hundred years or so has been the loss of heathland commons, which were once extensive. Now only relatively small fragments survive around North Baddesley. The most important of these is Emer Bog which is managed as a nature



*Small-leaved lime  
coppice in Ampfield Wood*



*Marsh Fritillary*

reserve by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. The bog with surrounding heath, acid grassland and woodland supports many characteristic heathland plants and animals.

The countryside immediately to the east of Romsey has great diversity. Ganger Wood, along The Straight Mile, is an unusual woodland with areas of Sessile Oak and Beech similar to woods in the New Forest.

The nearby Woodley Grange Meadows are situated on the edge of new development. These species-rich meadows were threatened by plans for housing. However, following a public inquiry, they were passed to the County Council and are now grazed by a New Forest commoner's cattle in the summer months.

The eastern part of the Heritage Area is characterised by a wooded ridge that extends to the edge of the Itchen Valley. There are a number of important woodlands in this area including Trodds Copse and Otterbourne Park Wood.

Trodds Copse is one of the richest ancient woodlands in Hampshire with an exceptionally diverse ground flora. It includes nationally rare woodland types and several uncommon plants such as Wood Club-rush and the orchid, Violet Helleborine. The wood and adjacent meadows were notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1989.

The majority of Otterbourne Park Wood is owned by the Woodland Trust and is managed to conserve its character and wildlife. The most distinctive feature is an area of oak coppice which was regularly cut to provide bark for the leather tanning industry. The Woodland Trust intends to coppice oak and other species to perpetuate this historic management system ■



*Southern Marsh Orchid*



## Safeguarding the Heritage

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To safeguard and pass on to future generations a diverse countryside, there is a need to identify and conserve those features that are of wildlife or historical importance.

The most important sites in the Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Scheduled Ancient Monuments or Countryside Heritage Sites. It is these areas that have received most attention in the past. There are, however, smaller sites of local importance and many gaps in our knowledge of the Heritage Area.

The designated sites are, in general, well managed. Elsewhere, habitats are deteriorating through lack of positive management. Attention needs to be focused on roadside verges, hedgerows, unmanaged woodland, fragments of heathland and isolated meadows.

The major tasks in the years ahead will be to ensure that sites already identified as important, continue to be well managed and to create opportunities to restore, conserve and extend other sites of landscape or wildlife importance.

In conserving the special areas, it is important not to lose sight of the significance of the whole. Preserved between the M3, the built-up areas of Romsey and Southampton's suburbs and the chalk downlands to the north, is a remnant of historic Hampshire countryside. It is a patchwork of small fields, mature woods and remnants of heathland distinctly different from its surroundings. Its uniqueness and conservation depend on resisting the pressures for change brought about by its position on the edge of the urban area ■

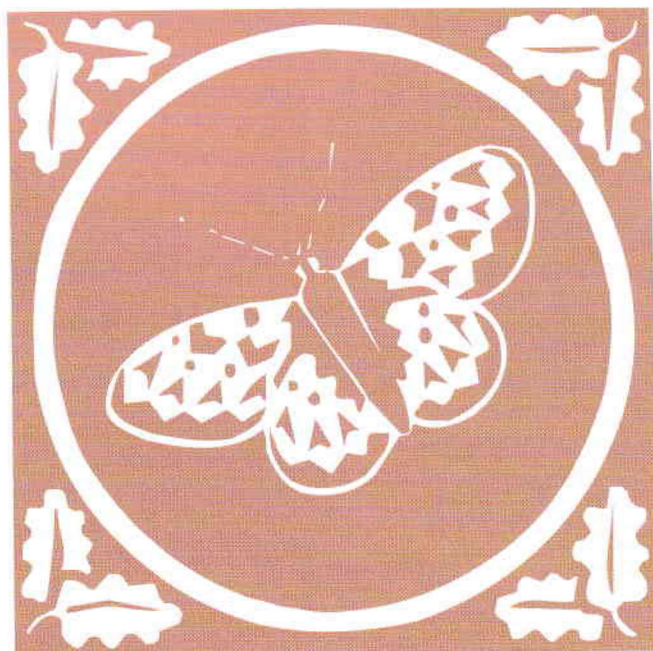
## **The Steering Group**

In January 1991, an inaugural meeting of the Ampfield Countryside Heritage Area Steering Group was held to bring together various interest groups within the Area. The Group, which now meets regularly, is made up of representatives of parish councils, local authorities, landowners and other organisations and individuals with an interest in the Heritage Area.

The main aims of the Steering Group are:

- to encourage greater understanding of the ecology and landscape of the Heritage Area; and
- to promote schemes of ecological and landscape enhancement.

The Steering Group achieves these aims by co-ordinating studies, volunteers and management projects within the Heritage Area ■





## Projects



*Boardwalk on Emer Bog*

A detailed knowledge of the Heritage Area is essential if action is to be directed in a co-ordinated way.

Records of the landscape history and ecology of the Area are held in many locations. An early priority is to survey and collate these records.

Occasional papers will be produced on subjects of general interest.

Local volunteers have carried out valuable conservation work for the Woodland Trust at Otterbourne Park Wood and for the Hampshire Wildlife Trust at Emer Bog. The success of future projects will depend on close community involvement.

The amount of flower-rich grassland has declined significantly in recent years and there has been a great deal of interest in reversing this trend. Long stretches of roadside verge are species-poor and many of these are capable of enrichment by planting appropriate wild flowers.

The County Council and the Steering Group are working together on a pilot project to enrich roadside verges in the Heritage Area.

The project aims to bring back some of the colourful wild flowers that used to be so much a part of the countryside.

Other opportunities will be made to recreate habitats lost through agricultural intensification or development. Heathland is a priority.

A Working Group has been formed to consider the role of footpaths in promoting public appreciation of the ecological and historic landscape significance of the area.

There is considerable scope for further studies and projects.

One idea, not yet developed, is for a hedgerow survey to identify the surviving ancient hedges shown on the 1588 Hursley map and determine which are in need of positive management or enhancement ■



*Wild flower planting*

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B A D E S L E Y

Somers pond

Newlandes

Amble comon or heath

Badlesley heath

Badlesley heath

Newlandes

Hittingbury

Heath

Heath

Mallbore

Heath

Feeldhorle

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