

Cowbridge Notes

River Flitt – The Flitt rises from a number of springs at Chalton and is then added to by the Water Treatment works. From here the river meanders on through Westoning, Flitwick, Clophill, and Shefford where it joins the river Ivel.

Dragonflies and Butterflies are familiar sights around the footbridges in the summer months and you may catch sight of a flash of blue as a Kingfisher dart along the river beneath the bushes. Although Kingfishers are noted for their fishing ability in this area they seem to live off the many insects which thrive in and just above the water amongst the tree lined embankments. The vegetation along the river contains a variety of nuts berries and wild flowers and together with the insects provides essential food supplies for many of our farmland birds. Fish can occasionally be seen in some parts of the river and Otter and Mink have also been sighted.

Woodcock Wood

Probably named because the area of woodland and wetland meadow was ideal for breeding and shooting woodcock; a great table delicacy in the 18th & 19th Centuries. Originally part of the deer forest known as Ladywell it was the Deer forest belonging to Toddington Manor. The wood was largely cleared for agriculture in the 18th century and parts were allowed to grow again in the early 19th century to provide hunting and shooting facilities. .

Woodlands such as this were once an essential part of the farm, providing wood for a multitude of jobs around the farms as well as providing food, such as berries and fruit in addition to Deer, Rabbit and Game birds. The importance of Woodcock Wood to the Manor estate is indicated by the fact that within the woodland once stood a cottage known as “Keepers Cottage” where the gamekeeper lived and would have the responsibility for managing the wood. The cottage fell out of use and became a home for a family evacuated from London during WWII. The cottage burnt down in 1948 and the remaining structure was removed for other uses, nothing now remains but the clearing in which the cottage stood.

A survey of the wood in 2002 identified over 30 woodland wild flower species as well as 16 different species of mature native trees. It is also home to Foxes, Badgers, Squirrels, and other small mammals and many songbirds. Woodcock wood is now a part of the Heathcote Estates wildlife conservation programme and the woodland remains private in order to protect the flora and fauna.

Fields

In the 17th Century this area was heavily wooded. But by the end of the 18th century it had been cleared of trees and was drained for growing crops. Hedgerows were planted and fields converted to grass for grazing livestock. During the 20th century some of the hedgerows were removed and the land cultivated for food crops such as Oilseed rape, Wheat and Beans.

Hipsey Spinney.

Hipsey Spinney is classed as Ancient Woodland and is shown on the "Agas" map dated 1581, we know that at that time it was part of a mature wood known as "Ladywell wood" making Hipsey Spinney at least 500 years old. In addition to being used for hunting, archaeological evidence shows that it has over many years been used to supply timber for fencing and building, fuel for fires and Hazel sticks for making Hurdles and repairing hedges.

There does not appear to be any documentary evidence to show how the wood got its name but “Hipsey” or “Ipsey” is a word used in other parts of the country meaning a lookout. Certainly the hill on which the spinney stands offers good views in all directions. Although only a small area of woodland it remains private because of its historical importance and the fact that it contains some protected species of Flora and Fauna.

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