

The Last Meadow

A Study of the Historic Landscape of Corbett Meadow,
Amblecote, West Midlands. January 2022.



Fig 1: Corbett Meadow General View circa 2019 (Photo Graham Beckley).

Produced on behalf of the Corbett Meadow Action Group by Robert Bevan-Jones
and Helen Cook.

Introduction

In recent decades, the story of Corbett Meadow has been somewhat fraught. Since at least the early 1990's, there have been attempts to build houses on the site. By 2005, the owners, Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, had already sold half of the Victorian charitable Corbett Hospital site, which is now covered by housing. Since then, the remaining portion, Corbett Meadow itself, has been interpreted by the owners as being "surplus to requirements" and is currently earmarked to be sold to the highest bidder and it is currently of interest to property developers. This is an unwelcome prospect for many reasons. As detailed in this paper, the Corbett Meadow merits protection and preservation.

The whole site was originally gifted in 1893 by the businessman and philanthropist, "Salt King" John Corbett, for the building of a local hospital to be built in (and around) an 18th century mansion called "The Hill". This Georgian building and other hospital buildings were demolished when the Hospital Trust sold the land it was on for housing, which was then built on the site and part of the grounds, in 2010.

Although Corbett made his fortune in Droitwich, he was born locally in The Delph, Brierley Hill. His philanthropy included bestowing his childhood area of the Black Country with gifts, including the Corbett charitable Hospital and the surrounding meadows in 1893. After the formation of the National Health Service in 1948, the site and meadows migrated to ownership and management of the NHS free of charge. As mentioned earlier, in circa 2007 the local authority sold half of the park (and part of the meadows) and houses were built over it. The "The Hill" mansion was levelled, along with the old hospital and medical services were scaled down. These projects were completed in 2010.

In 2022, a group of relatives and descendants of John Corbett from around the country met members of the Corbett Meadow Action group to express their enduring support for the campaign to protect the meadow and prevent it being from destroyed by proposed housing plans. The family members present, viewed this prospect as being contrary to the intention of the original gift by their ancestor, which was to be used by local people. The original gift stated that the hospital *and its surrounding park* be for the benefit of subscribing patients, mainly people of Amblecote, Stourbridge and surrounding areas. The new John Corbett Outpatient Centre, completed in 2006, also reduced the acreage of Corbett Meadow. Its café windows look out onto its features, the cattle, wildflowers, trees and ponds. This undulating pastoral spectacle is the last unchanged visible vestige of the original gift and bequest of John Corbett. The history and significance of this remaining meadow is the main subject of this paper.

The Brierley Hill Advertiser newspaper, dated 5th August 1893, states that the original hospital site is "situated in the green borderlands of the Black Country, a kind of oasis on the edge of a waste". Its grounds, now only represented by Corbett Meadow, is also described much as it looks today, "an undulating surface carpeted with ancient turf, and studded with stately trees, with kine and sheep browsing or lazily ruminating in the shade form a picture so entirely rural that one might fancy himself far indeed far from the stress and strain of everyday life in a manufacturing district". The article continues to add that the green grounds of the hospital were considered a distinct benefit to patients, that "during convalescence.... the patient is hungering and thirsting for fresh air ... the pleasure that can be drawn from a noble landscape and beautiful surroundings is no small matter in aiding recovery." Corbett Meadow, today deliberately visible from the modern outpatient café windows, is the last visible remnant of this original vista.

With the National Health Service now nationally promoting "green surgeries," and "green prescribing", supporting the merits of natural spaces being used for the health of the community, saving expenditure on conventional therapies, this green place could have a valuable multi-faceted role to play in the future of the National Health Service. The Corbett Meadow Action Group has the full support of several

local general practitioners, including former Primary Care Network Clinical Director, Brierley Hill & Amblecote Dr Ruth Tapparo. With the support of the local M.P. Suzanne Webb and several senior local General Practitioners, the action group are urging Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to investigate this as a benign, financially viable usage of the meadow. This is the current situation of the meadow now owned by Dudley Hospital Trust Group, managed today with a serious threat that it may be sold for housing development due to its unprotected status.

For several reasons, it seems that to sell this “last meadow” for houses could be a huge mistake, losing a valuable historic community resource for only short-term economic gain. This green urban space is a valuable resource; an important piece of green landscape that has been cherished, used and appreciated by local people for centuries. A beautiful natural space in the midst of industry. It has been variously used, both as a part of an historic garden for a house occupied for a time by the owner of one of Amblecote’s leading glasshouses, then for most of the 20th century, for the annual hospital fetes which brought over 20,000 paying visitors to the meadows every August, being also used by the staff and patients to generally feel the benefit of the unspoilt green space. Corbett Meadow is also of significant urban ecological merit in the context of its ancient ponds, mature assembly of trees and associated biodiversity, a valuable corridor for ecology in an urban environment. Ecologically, it is linked to the nearby Coalbourne brook. It has importance as a corridor for urban biodiversity and supports a wealth of wildlife and habitats. It is a scarce unspoilt urban ancient oasis of nature of considerable local historic significance. Corbett Meadow also being of high historic value, including being a part of the internationally famous local glass industry heritage, makes a persuasive case for its listing and general protection where possible in perpetuity. This was surely the wish of John Corbett, who originally gifted the site for the benefit of the people of Amblecote, Stourbridge and its surrounding areas.

History of the Hospital Site



Fig 2: 1903 Amblecote OS map. This map shows a good part of the meadow and original hospital and the main pond, that sits within the meadow today. This is how the land surrounding the hospital appeared at the time it was first opened in 1903. Compare Fig 3 for development since that time.



Fig 3: 2021 Google Earth view of the site as it appears today. The large pond in the meadow is visible above the last “T” in Corbett, surrounded by trees. A smaller pond in the meadow also discussed in this paper is just SE not visible on this map.

This map in fig 3 shows the extent of transformation that has already taken place.

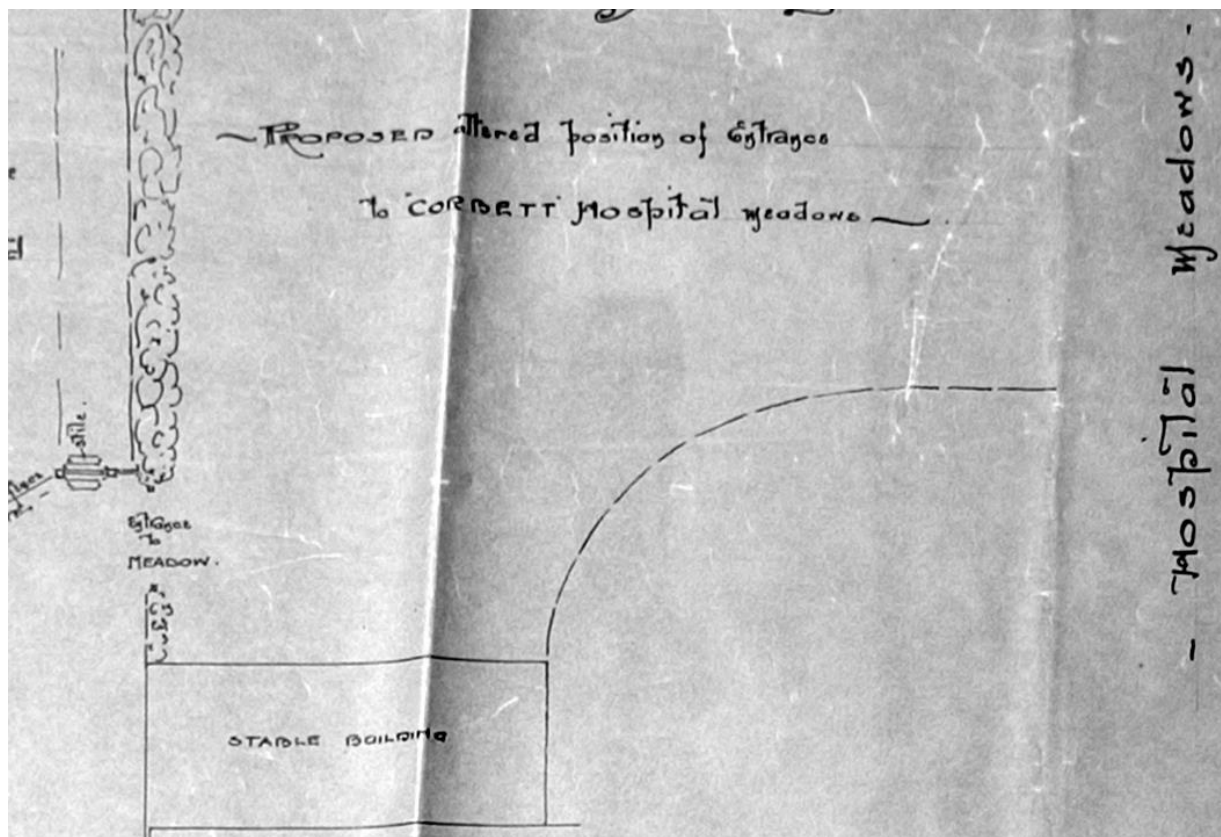


Fig 4: 1899 Plan detail showing hospital meadows and adjustments to “entrance to meadows”. (Amblecote History Society /Dudley Archives).

These original plans show the original extent of the meadows, half of which have now already been built on. In this plan, the original hospital building is shown, the Georgian mansion known as “The Hill”, now demolished. As you can see from this plan the meadows were original features of the grounds of the Georgian mansion. The name “The Hill” refers to Windmill Hill, which Corbett Meadow lies on. Fig 4 shows how the hospital meadows at the time of the building of the hospital extended to almost the house itself. Much of that land is now housing.

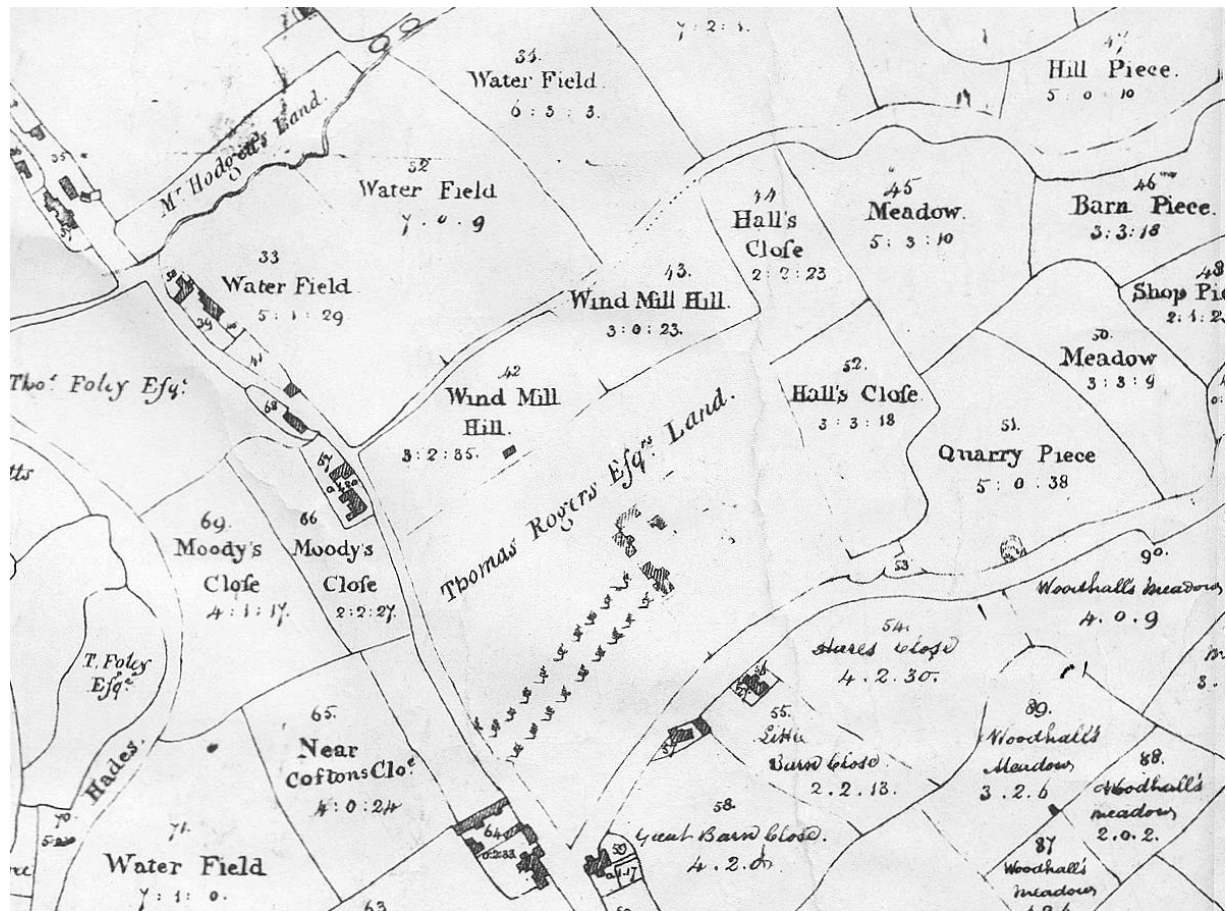


Fig 5: This is a detail from a 1760 map of Amblecote held at Enville Hall.

All the land surrounding the site is typical of a rural mediaeval hamlet. Thomas Rogers owned the nearby Holloway Glassworks in Amblecote. His home The Hill became the charitable hospital donated by John Corbett. In the centre of the map, Corbett Meadow today occupies land across parts of parcels numbered 42 and 43, named Wind Mill Hill, that have still not been built on, or adapted for modern uses. Comparing to fig 3 and 2, you can see the field boundaries are still largely visible.



Fig 6: In the earliest map we found of the “Manor of Amblecote,” William Deeley's "*A Mapp of the Severall Mannors Lands and Tenements of the Honourable John Grey Esqr. in the County of Stafford conteyning in the whole 2407: Accres, 1: Rood, 8: Perch.*", produced in 1688 held at Enville Hall. (Photo from Amblecote History Society Archive, map Enville Hall Archives).

In fig 6, the path between the Little Fields and Wind-mill Hill land parcels drifts away from the edge, at the exact place we now know had the large Corbett Meadow pond since at least 1769. Although the pond is not directly shown as may not have warranted, perhaps this route, drifting into the field away from the edge at this point, away from the where the pond was shown in 1768 and today, was chosen due to wet ground here affecting the trackway during floods. This demonstrates the age of the pond on Corbett meadow, as discussed later in the paper (please see figs 18-20). In this 1688 map, the Windmill Hill land parcel is shown as one field only. Later they became two. (This forms part of the Corbett Meadow today.) The adjacent “water fields” as described in the 1760 map (fig 5) are here called “Little Fields.” The fields and boundaries correlate with the 1760 map, as existing boundary features existing today, now partly built on and partly turned into allotments and a football pitch on Dennis Park, their boundaries still run approximately along these earlier markings. Discussing these features adjacent to the Corbett meadow itself, helps put the meadow in an historic landscape context. The pre 1760 field names that surround Corbett Meadow suggest that medieval Amblecote was a small, rural, agricultural hamlet, Barn Piece, Meadow, Meadow, Ox Leasow, Clover Field, etc. Almost all of these have now been built on, except Corbett Meadow.

According to work done by John Hemingway PhD and Jennifer Foster in 2006 in a digital map they helped create of Amblecote in 1760, a field next to and including part of Corbett Meadow was called

Hanbury Field. This type of place-name is usually considered significant, often denoting a fortified pre Norman era homestead or fort that probably stood on the hill, part of which yet remains inside Corbett Meadow. This place-name is discussed more later in the paper, incorporating research by Kevin James.

The 1760 map is of interest to landscape archaeologists as it predates the later 19th century swathe of parliamentary enclosures. Christopher Taylor argues that fields of the kind of asymmetrical shape of those next to Corbett meadow are enclosed mediaeval strip fields. Later enclosed fields of the 19th century generally tend to be fiercely regimented and rectangular. The curving sides to these, “Little Fields”/“Water Fields”, their sizes and lengths, surrounded by oddly shaped irregular parcels, fit the model he describes for enclosed earlier strip fields, of a likely medieval date, most of which originated after 1200. Archaeologist and landscape historian John Hemingway PhD notes that “Little Field” field next to Corbett meadow was enclosed in 1576. This 1576 enclosure of small fields, being sided with curved boundaries, as shown in 1688 likely enclosed former strip fields of the type that Hemingway identified as underlying the existing road system and layout of buildings in the oldest parts of Stourbridge town. If so, this suggests that surviving green land such as Wind Mill Hill (now partly Corbett Meadow) plausibly represent a patch of an agricultural green mediaeval landscape, that could have been recognizable as it appears today, back to the Norman period and perhaps beyond. Corbett meadow is perhaps the last surviving significantly unchanged piece of land surviving as it appeared in the context of the mediaeval rural parish.

The Naming of Windmill Hill.

The Corbett Meadow occurs today partly located on parts of two fields once known as Windmill Hill (and part of an earlier Hanbury Field). According to John Hemingway PhD writing in in 2006, there was a windmill “at Coalbourne recorded in the 15th century”. Already established as being named “Windmill-hill” before 1688, perhaps the Windmill on Windmill Hill was this one noted by Hemingway as being recorded “at Coalbourne” in the 15th century, Coalbourne brook being only a few hundred metres from Windmill Hill.

This place-name Windmill Hill, led to the naming of the Georgian mansion known as “The Hill”, that the charitable hospital was named after. I would suggest that the parcel of land marked on that 1688 map as “Wind mill Hill” (see fig 6) once contained the functioning windmill. I suggest this partly through logic, that on the entire Windmill Hill, only this field/parcel of land had this specific name.



Fig 7: 1760 map, detail showing building in the meadow, as a black rectangle, possibly the site of the original 15th century windmill. (Enville Hall Archive).

There is no suggestion in this map (fig 7) that the building inside this parcel of land was originally a part of a landscape scheme related to the Georgian house called The Hill. All the other buildings shown inside fields on the 1760 map are linked to the naming of the parcel, such as in Great Barn Close. The building shown inside that parcel is presumably the eponymous great barn. Inside the Windmill Hill enclosed parcel, it would logically make sense that the sole building within it, may have been relevant to

the naming of the plot of land. If so, the foundations of this building, possibly a windmill, may just today still be inside the boundary of the Corbett meadow, adding to its historical significance.



Fig 8: Robert Williamson map 1769. This possible windmill building feature is also shown on this map. Please compare with fig 5,7 and fig 9.

This 1841 plan in fig 9 (below) shows an odd later asymmetrical extension to the outline of the property "The Hill", a semi-circle extending into the corner of what is now Corbett Meadow. This corresponds exactly to a building marked on the 1760 map, figs 5 and 7 that tentatively is interpreted as a possible windmill. It may be that the base of the windmill, ruin of the building was perhaps incorporated into a garden scheme, as a fashionable viewpoint for a vista, in the style of Capability Brown, possibly at the time a haha was dug around the top of the hill, as part of a garden scheme for the owner of the Hill.

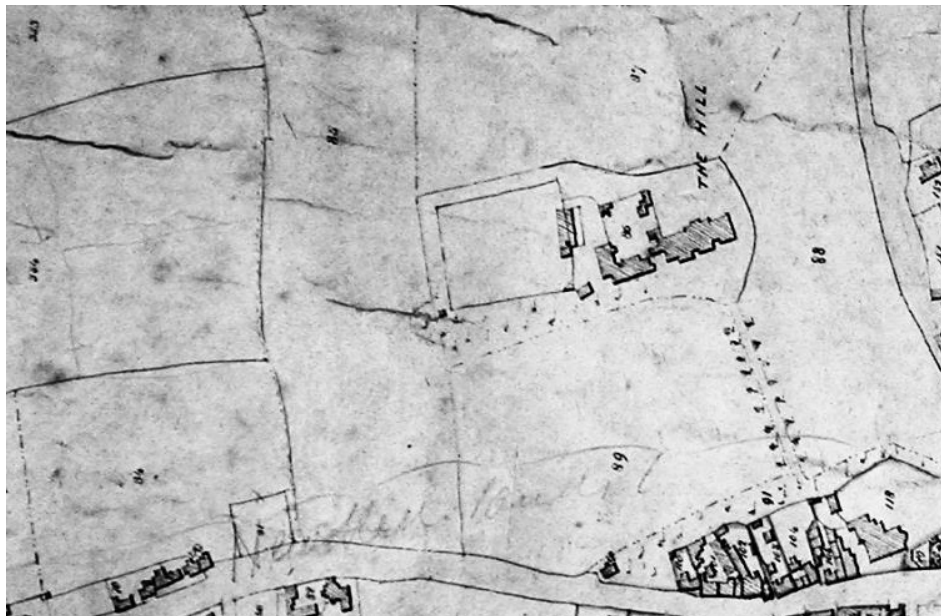


Fig 9: From 1841 plan of the hamlet of Amblecote. The location of the building shown in the 1760 map is now incorporated into the outline of the Hill property. (Photo: Amblecote History Society archive/Envile Hall Archives).

Corbett Meadow: Glass History Connections

Corbett Meadow should be included in the Council area defined as the Glass Quarter Historic landscape. To be listed as an important unspoilt part of the familiar original 18th- 19th century landscape of the most important parish in the glass quarter, Amblecote, with many glass heritage associations, as discussed herein. The existing Glass Heritage document delineating the important features of the local area, generally includes factory buildings, pubs, churches and homes relating to glass workers. There is no recreational space for the workers included in the document.

Only one green space used annually by many hundreds of glass workers (and their families) yet survives in an unspoilt state, in Amblecote, Corbett Meadow. The annual fetes held on the meadow to raise money for the 1893 charitable hospital were held from 1893 into the 1960's. These were attended in some years by over 20,000 people over one weekend. According to James Measell PhD, "in 1867, Addison estimated that the glass trade 'gives employment to about 1,500 people in this district.' Along with their families, one can speculate that several thousand attendees of Corbett Hospital fetes held on the meadows, would likely have been linked directly to the local glassmaking industries (including mining). These fetes often included glass exhibitions. Even the opening of the hospital in 1893 the opening fete had as its centrepiece a huge exhibition of glass as can be seen from this document, a detail from the cover of the programme for the opening event in 1893, included a "Grand Exhibition of Glass."

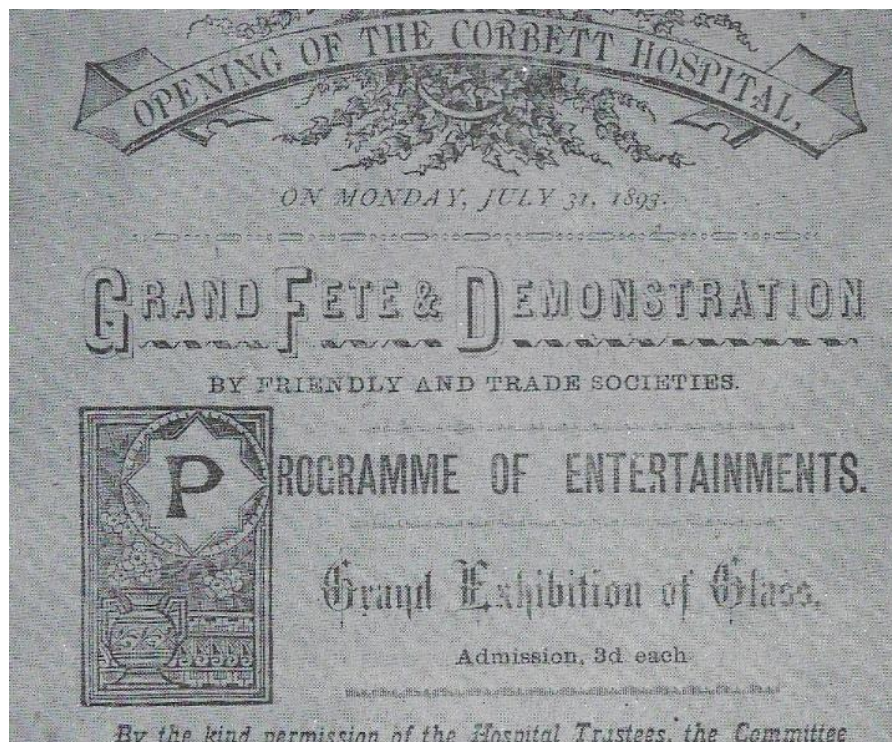


Fig 10: During "a grand exhibition of glass". (Photo from Stourbridge and District A Portrait in Old Picture Postcards by Michael Reuter).

This glass exhibition at the opening of the Hospital would doubtless have included items from the nearby Webb factory and Stevens and Williams. On nearby Collis Street, directly opposite Corbett

Meadow, stands Dennis Hall. Dennis Hall is already a part of the glass quarter historic landscape and has been grade II listed since 1971. This grade listing is partly because the famous glass industrialist Thomas Webb lived and worked for much of his adult life in the building. Originally built in the 1770's, Dennis Hall is building in a tradition where the landscape surrounding a major house was of critical importance to the building.

Historic England states "Dennis Hall is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: Architectural: the building is a classical composition which is designed with assurance and a clear knowledge of the English classical repertoire. * Historical interest: the association with the Webb factory, which produced some of the finest cameo glass in England in the C19 is of considerable interest and ties the building firmly to its setting in Amblecote area of Stourbridge, which was known throughout the C18 and C19 for the manufacture of glass. * Historical interest: the building has a clear connection with the early industrial development of the West Midlands and with the type of house, which was built for industrialists at the end of the C18 and start of the C19. According to Historic England, Dennis Hall became owned by "Thomas Webb in c.1855, and he attached his glassworks to the rear of the property. The house served as office accommodation for the factory and as his family home."

The main views from Dennis Hall directly face Windmill Hill. Corbett Meadow forms a key visible part of this hill and is the very last unspoilt portion of Windmill Hill not yet built on today. Corbett Meadow directly faces the building's key aspect, the views yet seen today from the front of the house. To the architect, this undulating green land dotted with trees was of critical importance for the location and design of the house. Windmill Hill (including Corbett Meadow) has provided a significant portion of the essential rustic vista, integral to the original design of the property Dennis Hall for over 200 years.

Most agree that this building is a jewel in the crown of the glass quarter. Corbett meadow is a key surviving part of the original vista of Dennis Hall that the architect viewed and desired to be a part of the landscape surrounding it. It can be said that Corbett Meadow is the only portion of land that remains visible today from the house. It is unchanged from how the residents of Dennis House, including Thomas Webb, have seen it for centuries.

This green space, Corbett Meadow, the only surviving unspoilt portion of what is called Windmill Hill, would have been a familiar sight to the legendary Amblecote glass businessman Thomas Webb, every day looking from the windows of his many years residing at Dennis House. The historic landscape of the glass quarter ought to include green spaces recognizable and much used by glass workers, as well as merely buildings. Locals, casual visitors and glass enthusiasts, can also still share that impressive view that Thomas Webb enjoyed every day, even today. This fact alone makes a significant argument for the inclusion of the meadow as part of the Glass Quarter.

Of course, Corbett Meadow has many other ties to the historic glass industry. The original 1893 charitable Corbett Hospital site (of which the meadow was formerly an integral part) was based on another historic house with very strong glass industry links, "The Hill". Now demolished and built upon, The Hill was the residence of Thomas Rogers, owner of "The Hill Estate" from at least 1750-1787. He was owner of the nearby Holloway glassworks, historically one of the largest early glass factories in Amblecote. Corbett Meadow formed a major part of the grounds of his historic home and today is the last unchanged surviving portion of it. Corbett Meadow remains the last unspoilt portion of this property, "The Hill", that had it too remained standing, would surely have also been listed as part of the historic glass quarter landscape.

Corbett meadow remains as the last visible vestige of this once grand property, where on many occasions in the eighteenth century, the owner, Thomas Rogers of Holloway glass in Amblecote, once a

cornerstone of the glass industry, would have strolled or ridden. He would have looked from his garden or house over the land known as Corbett meadow, getting a clear view of Dennis Hall, scarcely 300m away, in direct line of sight, over the top of nearby Coalbourne brook. (His grandson the poet Samuel Rogers often visited here. These visits inspired the poem “Pleasures of Memory”, that includes the verse “Mark Yon Mansion frowning through the Trees”, echoing this scene at The Hill.) Glass manufacturer George Mills, son of Richard Mills owner of the Albert Glassworks in Wordsley also lived at The Hill from 1887-1885. Both these important figures of Stourbridge glass heritage would recognize Corbett Meadow today as part of their former grounds, looking yet unchanged from their day.

The links to Corbett meadow and glass do not even end there. When John Corbett had developed the property of The Hill in 1893 into the charitable Corbett Hospital with the meadows, to be enjoyed as a park for occasional use by local people, residents and patients, there was immediately arranged a series of large fetes, to raise money for the running of the hospital. These became very popular events, for example, in 1908, it attracted over 20,000 people on that August Bank holiday. These fetes were attended by hundreds of glassmaking families every year. Hundreds of mining families also attended. They helped provide vital raw materials for the glass industry. This was a vital annual break for thousands of workers in the working year that was much anticipated. These celebrated fetes were held mainly on what is now Corbett Meadow.



Fig 11: 1953 fete on Corbett meadow. Thousands of these families, were glass workers or indirectly were linked to the glass industry. (photo 1953 fete Amblecote History Society/Dudley Archive).

These annual fetes became very popular events, attracting over 20,000 people on August Bank holiday in 1908 and the same number in 1923. In 1920 over 34,000 attended over the two days. In 1913, during the weekend, 30,984 sixpences were received for admission. Various attractions at the fetes included military bands, acrobats, including the “Charles Thomas Trio of aerial gymnasts”. There were also hot air

balloon parachutists, who released themselves from the balloons. (One lady who could not release herself later landed safely near Droitwich). There were also other entertainers, including “Mons. Pergo, the Man Monkey,” the “trick cycling of the Fandor troupe of lady cyclists,” and the Zeimer Bros, described as “acrobatic, eccentric and comedy knockabouts”.

At the 1905 fete, “Mr Spencer’s Airship Flight” from Corbett Meadow made a historic flight. Stanley Spencer lifted off and flew it under its own power towards Brierley Hill. It landed at the golf course at Scotts Green then it was transported by cart back to Amblecote. His underpowered machine had struggled to fly, lifted by an envelope of town-gas from the nearby Stourbridge gas works that was cheaper than hydrogen. However, it was genuinely pioneering. Something entirely new, it represented the first powered flight across the Black Country, that would not be repeated in the area for another five years. Only two years earlier in America, the first experimental aeroplane had taken off the ground for a short distance; here at the Corbett Meadow fete, observers would have not known whether propellers and wings or powered balloons would eventually prevail as a technology for flight.

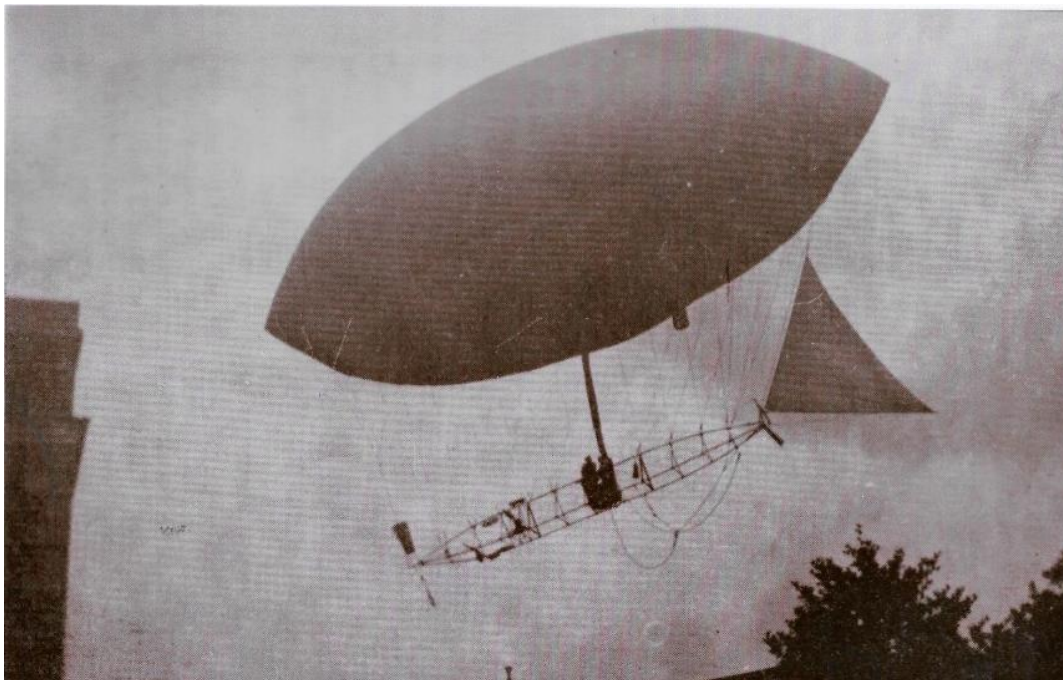


Fig 12: Mr Spencer’s Airship Flight at 1905 Corbett Hospital Fete (Mr M.H.A. Moody)

Apart from the official numbers of attendance, the events were attended by many other people. In 1923 “besides those in the grounds, thousands of residents in the near neighbourhood” between 9.30 and 10pm “watched the fireworks.” These were provided by W and J Wilder, “pyrotechnic specialists from Birmingham.” They recreated a Naval battle in fireworks, their shrapnel shells were so realistic that they “carried one back to France.” The fireworks were generally set off from “The high embankment opposite the hospital on the eastern border the grounds”, this is still a part of the Corbett Meadow site today. The embankment runs along where the path known as the gully heads towards Vicarage Road, not far from where the smaller pond is inside Corbett Meadow, on the high ground there. From 1893, to at least 1960 these fetes occurred annually on Corbett meadow.



Fig 13: Gymkhanas were regularly held on the meadow. Also shown in this image is the large pond at Corbett meadow, present since at least 1769 and discussed later in this document, fig 19 etc. (1953 Dudley archive/Amblecote History Society Archive).

J. S. Williams-Thomas O.B.E. who ran the family business the glass factory Stevens and Williams, was a steward for the horse events such as these shown in fig 13, that were held on Corbett Meadow. More importantly, he was also vice chairman of the board of the hospital for many years, when Viscount Cobham was chairman and president.



Fig 14: Image of J. S. Williams-Thomas was director of Stevens and Williams Ltd (the Crystal Years by R.S. Williams-Thomas).

J. S. Williams-Thomas was director of Stevens and Williams Ltd, for many years. His name is one of the most important names in glass history. He became associated with John Northwood and together at his factory they helped produce some of the most famous intaglio glass of all time, contributing directly to the greatness of the name of Stourbridge glass. During his time, some of the most famous names in Stourbridge made their names at his factory, including Frederick Carder and Joshua Hodgetts. Williams-Thomas died in 1933. His obituary states he was an original member of the board of Management for the Corbett Hospital, later becoming a trustee. He was a stalwart supporter of the hospital and meadows. He lived within walking distance, at Elmsley House. Now demolished, it stood opposite The Hill estate.

Another celebrated glass industrialist contributed to the original charitable Corbett Hospital. In 1893, Edward and Mrs Webb promised to donate £1,000 to the building of part of the hospital, in memory of C.E. Swindell. According to the national archives, (this is approximately £82,000 today). On another occasion, he donated £5,000 (the equivalent to £410,000, today), towards the building of another memorial ward.

According to Jason Ellis, “Edward Webb of Wordsley and his cousin Joseph Webb of Amblecote formed a partnership and took over Holloway End Glassworks, Wordsley, to manufacture flint glass. Edward and Joseph were cousins of Thomas Webb who operated Platts Glassworks. Edward had previously been a farmer, and Joseph had previously worked as a packer for Webb and Richardson at the Wordsley Flint Glassworks and then as a clerk for his cousin Thomas at Platts Glassworks. They agreed that Joseph would make the metal and Edward would handle the commercial activities of the business”..... “In October 1850 Joseph and Edward dissolved their partnership” “Joseph Webb left to take on Coalbournhill Glassworks” ... “leaving Edward Webb in sole control of Holloway End Glasshouse. In 1851 Edward Webb lived with his wife and family at Wordsley and employed a hundred hands. In 1853 he left Holloway End and moved to join his brother William at the White House Glassworks.” This is now the new site of the Stourbridge Glass Museum due to open April 2022. The examples of the participation of Edward Webb

being active in the funding of the original hospital help show that in total, the owners of at least five of the most important local glassworks, had significant enduring connections for many years, with the running of the original hospital building formerly known as The Hill and its grounds.

The many hundreds of glassworkers who enjoyed the annual fetes for decades on Corbett Meadow also ought to be remembered. These events provided rare chances for working men and their families to visit somewhere locally beautiful and enjoy themselves. Famous Amblecote residents associated with glass design in circa 1900 would have enjoyed the meadow and its fetes, such as Hugo Masey and Jules Barbe, who at one time, lived on nearby King William Street, only a few minutes walk away. For many decades, from at least 1893-1950, this may have been a highlight of the year for many glassworkers and so indicates an overlooked chance to add this to the glass quarter, or at least to become listed. Open spaces of this kind are under-represented in both types of protection and ought to be recognized. Corbett Meadow is now being the only surviving portion left of this rare annual recreational space for working people.

Local glassworkers cherished this green space as a valuable resource and important part of their landscape. An example of this is shown in the work of glass engraver, artist and pawnbroker Jabez Hingley. He painted a view of the meadow in 1919 from the window of his house on nearby Vale Street, just around the corner from Dennis Hall. According to a member of Amblecote History Society, Michael Hoggins, Jabez was born in 1840 died 1923. When he lived in Unicorn Street, according to the 1881 census, he was listed as a glass engraver with two apprentices and was also a pawnbroker. Later, he lived variously at number 9 and 12 Vale Street, a street that overlooks the meadow, situated on the corner where it meets nearby Collis Street. In 1919 he painted this affectionate depiction of the meadow.



A romantic winter view of a distant Corbett Hospital - reproduced from an oil painting by Jabez Hingley - a pawnbroker, who lived in Vale Street Amblecote. The scene is as he saw it from his home, in 1919, (i.e. from the direction of Collis Street). The painting was a 21st birthday present to their housemaid, the late Mrs. Pru Wood. She passed it on to Mrs. Gathe Hayden, of Wordsley, who kindly allowed us to take this copy.

Fig 15: 1919 Jabez Hingley painting of Corbett Meadow. (Photo:Black Country Bugle)

The sheep and cows shown in the 1919 Jabez Hingley painting were likely owned by the tenants who John Corbett allowed to continue their tenancy after his acquisition of the site. The meadow was let for grazing for many years due to the good quality of the historic grassland sward. Mr Dunford of Amblecote Hall Farm (and later Marshes) regularly kept sheep here for final grazing before they went to market. They were regularly seen being driven down Vicarage Road (lane) in the twentieth century.

Natural History and Ecology of the Site.



Fig 16: Corbett Meadow June 2014: Buttercups, meadow vetchling, pignut, cranesbills, clover species, plantain, mixed mature tree species etc. The grassland is pignut grassland, now a rare survival in Dudley Borough. (Photo Helen Cook).

The naturalist and broadcaster Brett Westwood, who has a long association with the BBC Natural History Unit visited the site in February 2021. From his study of the site, he had some clear opinions about Corbett meadow.

"My first impression was incredulity - how had this gem survived intact for so long in a built-up area? Far from being the typical flat, sports-pitch urban green space, this relatively small area was wonderfully contoured and featured marshy hollows, a steep scarp, two willow-lined pools and many mature trees, survivors of its parkland past. Seeing this mosaic of habitats for the first time, I was reminded of the horse-pastures on the north side of the Clent Hills where old hedges surround steep fields rich in species such as Pignut and Red Clover. Needless to say these features are in very short supply within Dudley Borough. I think that was my strongest impression of the meadow - that it is one of the most important ecological lynchpins in the Stourbridge area. It connects surrounding open spaces such as the allotments and the sports-pitch, with local gardens and parks. It acts as a reservoir for local wildlife especially those species which need more than a strip of road-verge or canal-bank. Take away this reservoir and the richness disappears.

Connectivity of habitats in any area is important for many species from butterflies to newts and toads; at a time when more of us are noticing and appreciating the wildlife on our doorsteps, it would be an

unforgiveable loss if we allow the meadow to disappear. Planting a few saplings or sowing a patch of wildflowers is no substitute for a rich and varied ecosystem that has taken so long to develop and which is a unique product of geology, local history and management. Corbett's Meadow is not just a piece of grassland: for many of its species, whether they are Palmate Newts or Small Heath Butterflies, it is a life-raft out of the past and its loss would be nothing short of a tragedy not only for local wildlife, but also for the future generations who I hope will be able to enjoy it and explore its history and natural history."

This naturalist has made a passionate case for its preservation. Unploughed for many centuries, full of wildlife, located in the historic glass quarter, formerly owned by the owners of a historic Amblecote glasshouse, a genuine fragment of unspoilt rural mediaeval Amblecote, this site deserves protection indefinitely.



Fig 17: Ancient possibly spring fed small pond of unknown function southeast at Corbett Meadow. (Photo by Graham Beckley).

This pond is much higher in the landscape than the larger pond at the bottom of the hill. It is of such antiquity its purpose or function is entirely unrecorded. Historic water table changes due to industry and agriculture may have affected this pond; it may be a partly spring fed pond but tends to be referred to as a dew pond. Quite dry in summer, it can flood in winter. Visible in the field, is a channel leading down the hill, where water has historically passed towards the pond in the lower portion of the field. Further investigation is required to assess the landscape significance of this process. When the water levels were historically higher and drainage less managed, water must have regularly poured over the edge of this small pond and down the hill, in order to create a visible channel down the slope of the meadow. It is very close

to what is now called Vicarage Road, though it was originally called Amblecote Lane. This is the oldest road in Amblecote. Proximity to this ancient water feature near the top of a hill may have influenced the route of the road, as is often the case with ancient ponds, including the mediaeval trackway (now a footpath) by the big pond on the other side of the meadow. The gully behind this small pool may also be an early trackway, perhaps partly routed because of this pond.

According to research by local historian Kevin James PhD, 'Hanbury Piece' and two fields named 'Hanbury Leasows' on a 1688 map of Amblecote may refer to a site containing a pre-mediaeval fort site. Part of these fields form parts of the Corbett meadow today, including this ancient small pool. (fig. 17) and touching the larger lower pool (fig 18). If correct, the part of Corbett Meadow containing both pools, may be key features of a pre-Norman era settlement, that could possibly represent the earliest settlement we have records for, in Amblecote.

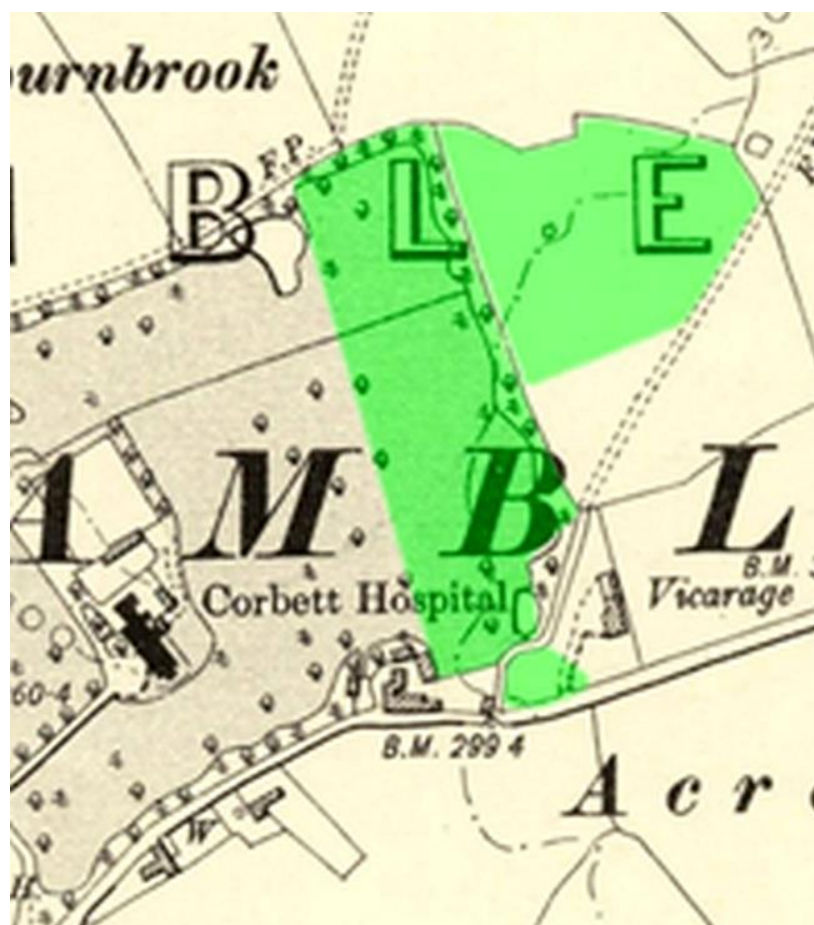


Fig: 18: Altered OS map. The figure shows the approximate location of the three 'Hanbury' named fields, of at least mediaeval date superimposed in green on the 1903 6-inch OS map. (Kevin James PhD)

According to Kevin James PhD,

“The small field to the south-west of the Vicarage is the 1688 Hanbury Piece, which is now occupied by the Vicarage General Stores and residential properties extending up to 2 Queen's Crescent. The other larger fields were both called '*Hanbury Leasowes*'. In this part of the West Midlands '*Leasow*' was a non-specific term for an enclosed piece of land and tended to be used for both cultivated ground and meadows. Both leasows had been parts of an older open field called '*Hanbury Field*.' The word '*Hanbury*'

is particularly interesting. The '-bury' ending usually (but not always) refers to a fortification of some kind. In these cases, it derives from the Old English (OE) terms 'burh' or 'burg' (or their dative forms 'byrig' or 'byrg') meaning 'a fortified place'. Such fortifications may date from the Anglo-Saxon period but the same term was also often used for much older Iron Age defensive structures; fortifications of both periods were usually built on high ground. The first element of the name may derive from the OE word 'hean' meaning high. Thus the 'Hanbury' field names (if not transferred from somewhere else entirely) seem to commemorate a 'high fortified place' in the vicinity. Indeed, there is a steep slope here leading up to the top of Queen's Crescent and the eastern edge of Corbett Meadow. A ridge of high ground extends east from the top of Vicarage Road towards 'Hanbury Piece'. The tips of such promontories were ideal sites for fortified settlements; and this one even has a water supply, a spring which still feeds a nearby pond today.

The path circumnavigating 'Hanbury Piece' and ascending north-east towards the tip of the promontory can be traced back as far as the 1837 Tithe Plan of Amblecote but it may be much older (unfortunately the 1769 and 1688 maps of Amblecote tend not to depict minor paths). It is conceivable that the path originated as an access route up to the supposed 'hean-bury' fortification. In fact, the western part of Vicarage Road heads straight for a bend in this path from the A491 (the course of a prehistoric salt-way); and it is not unreasonable to suppose that this section of Vicarage Road originated as a track linking the salt-way (which was the main arterial route through the region in the Iron Age) to 'Hanbury Piece'. Indeed, one wonders whether the putative fortification, at the top of the present-day Queen's Crescent, was the site of Amblecote's earliest settlement."

This analysis by James suggests that the small pond on the high ground in Corbett Meadow today, could be of some archaeological significance. The fact it is located within the ancient Hanbury place-names area of enclosed land, on high ground locally, suggests a strategic advantage for the site with possible fort like associations, that could have made great use of such a natural resource. James also implies that this pond was also perhaps not coincidentally located in close proximity to the Iron Age salt route of Vicarage Road.

This idea forms a persuasive argument for preserving this pond and the surrounding land in Corbett Meadow that was before 1688 referred to as *Hanbury Piece* and *Hanbury Leasowes*. If we look at this land inside Corbett Meadow today, it includes several acres of the meadow. This Hanbury research concept suggests that the local landscape significance and archaeological potential of this part of the meadow is probably not something that ought to be overlooked or destroyed.



Fig 19: Large pool in Corbett meadow, on the northern boundary. (Helen Cook)

This pond is also shown earlier in this paper, in fig 13, during the 1953 Corbett Hospital charitable fete. We have documentary records of this pond back to 1760. Perch and other fish have been recorded living in it. It also has a small area of marshland at one end including marshland species such as rushes and sedges, suggesting a marsh habitat of great age. We have records documenting its presence here for over 200 years. Fig 20 shows the shape of the large pond in fig 19 as it appeared in 1769. It is the shaded rectangle running along the northern boundary of the meadow at the bottom of this image. It was evidently historically much larger and extended to the boundary of Corbett meadow, with the modern footpath that runs over the fence today, which is a former road/track, dating to before 1760. With more archaeological study, we could state with more confidence about the importance of this feature. See fig 6 also.

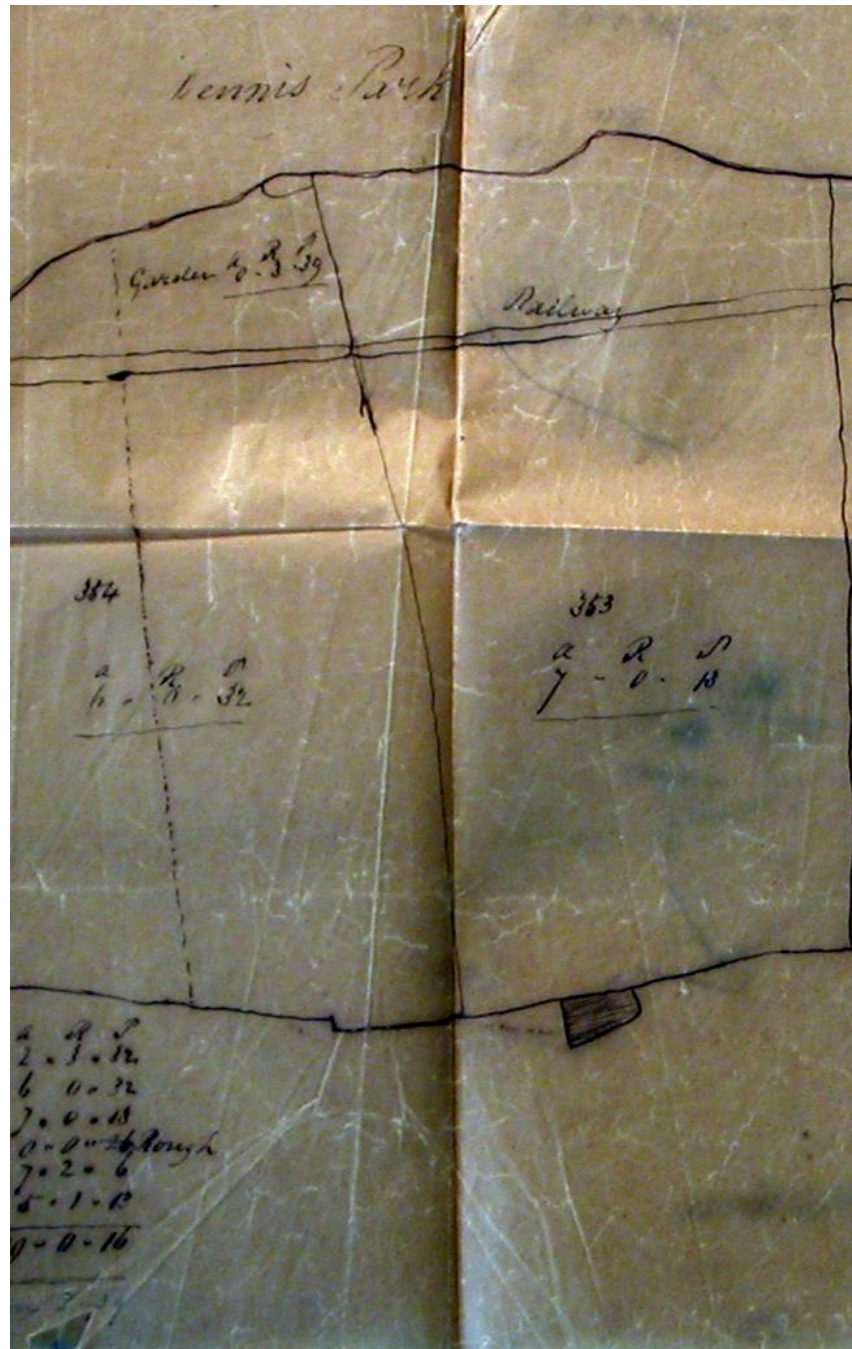


Fig 20: Detail from Memorandum to the Wheeley's 1769 plan showing pool in bottom of map (Enville Hall Archive)

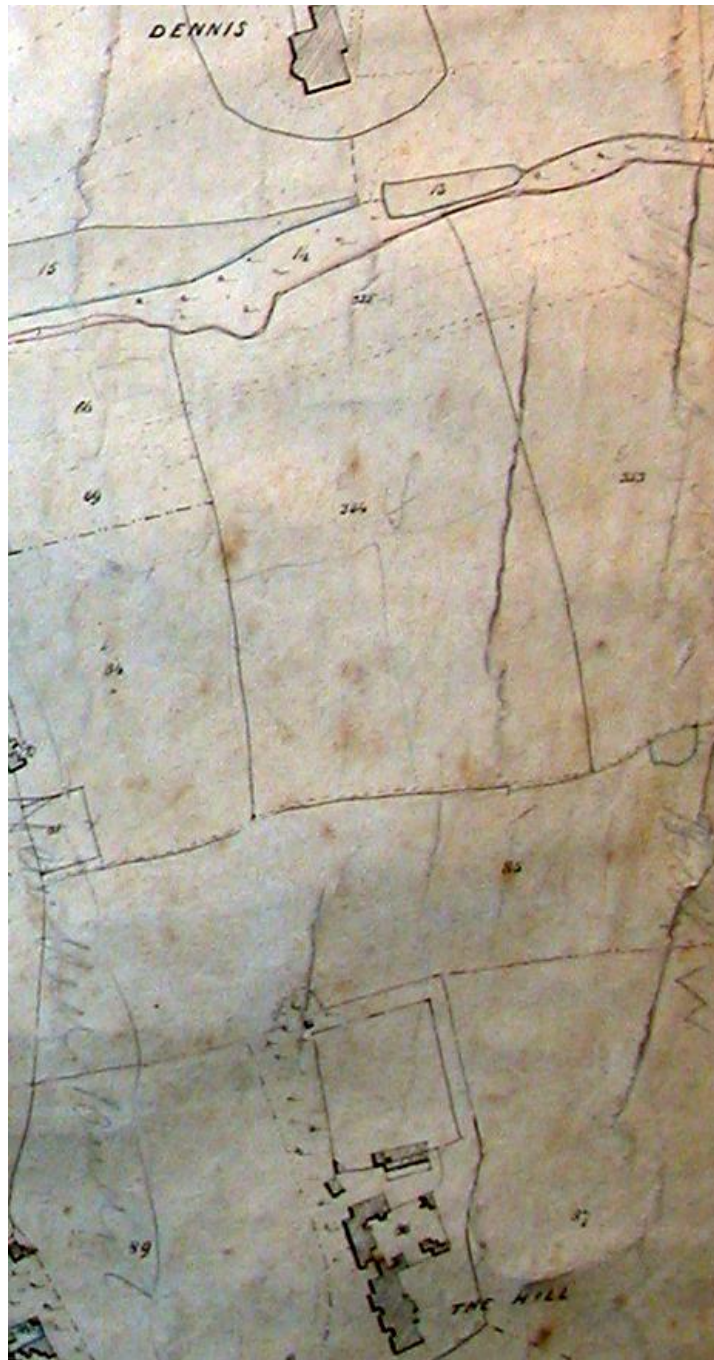


Fig 21: The large pool in Corbett meadow is shown halfway down on the right margin of this early ordinance survey map, circa 1840. (Dudley Archives)

We can also see how the view from Dennis Hall in the northern part, directly faced Corbett meadow and the rest of The Hill estate, shown at the time as fields. The pond has changed shape since 1760, perhaps responding to different eras of usage.

Trees Plants and other Wildlife



Fig 22: Part of veteran/ancient hawthorn hedgerow remnants in the meadow. (Photo Helen Cook).

Fig 22 shows a remnant of ancient hedge, a few metres inside the current boundary that are perhaps an original part of the original boundary hedge likely originally planted in the sixteenth century. Hawthorn hedges can sucker, that is, send forth new shoots from the roots, some trunks can die, the rootstock can regenerate and so a sixteenth century old hawthorn or holly hedge can have trunks in it perhaps no older than three centuries, yet the hedge remains and the rootstock can live that long.

These thorns were visited in 2021 by naturalist Brett Westwood.

“On the highest parts of the meadow, I was keen to inspect the veteran Hawthorns that appeared to follow an old hedge-line. For over a decade, I’ve been recording a nationally scarce and local insect, the Hawthorn Jewel beetle, which only breeds in old and wizened hawthorns. It’s not called a jewel for nothing: this beautiful bullet-shaped beetle is a metallic coppery-violet colour and emerges in midsummer from the thinner branches where its grub has fed on dead wood. A bitterly cold February morning wouldn’t seem the best time to look for them but Hawthorn Jewel Beetles leave clues. The adult beetle is rounded on top and flat underneath and so it creates an unmistakable D-shaped exit-hole when it emerges in July. I’d never seen them in Stourbridge before or indeed anywhere in the Dudley Borough. Really old hawthorns are pretty scarce and the adult beetles are notoriously

hard to find. But we will be looking out for them this summer at Corbett's Meadow because Helen and I were delighted to find several exit-holes in these venerable trees; a real bonus."



Fig 23: February 2021 "D" shaped exit hole of Hawthorn Jewel beetle at Corbett Meadow. It prefers to live in ancient stands of hawthorn, it is a very unusual presence in the Black Country and an uncommon sight in Dudley Borough. (photo: Brett Westwood).

Historically there were several veteran oaks, *Quercus* spp. recorded on the meadow, that were removed in the 2000's, apparently for safety reasons. The trunks were not left for insect habitants and were removed. Their presence would be the reason that the purple hairstreak *Favonius quercus* butterfly has often been recorded on the meadow, as it almost requires oak for its lifecycle. There were also examples of elms, *Ulmus* spp. now gone. These, along with large swathes of native bluebells, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* perhaps suggests an historic woodland component to parts of the surviving meadow, along with the natural ponds, perhaps together even indicating in part perhaps having been ancient wood pasture. The steepness of the site in parts is a significant reason why it shows no evidence of ever having been ploughed.



Fig 24: Possible remnants of 1567 hedging in Dennis Park 2021 (Robert Bevan-Jones)

Interestingly, some remnants of the 1567 hedging described by John Hemingway PhD may have survived. In Dennis Park this odd patch of old trees, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and hawthorn, *Crataegus monogyna* runs parallel to near where an original hedge for one of the little fields was recorded. I wonder if this may be part of the original hedging for the original “little fields”. The course of the boundary may have been changed on completion of the modern housing (behind the photographer) was built, including Trinity road. Remnants of suckering holly trees also survive, with some holly with hawthorns on the other side of this playing field, within the Corbett Meadow boundary itself. When hollies are in an ancient hedge, though the original trunks may persist for a couple of centuries, more trunks appear over several centuries (or more) where a bank of suckering offspring can spread creating the appearance of a holly hedge. Though not planted as a pure holly hedge, in many old fields around the area, this phenomenon can be seen and there may be an example of this where the edge of Corbett Meadow meets the path behind the allotments, leading to Amblecote high street. Mixed with hawthorn, in this photo and inside the meadow, holly and hawthorns may have been components of the 16th century hedge, which we have remnants that survive today.



Fig 25: Corbett Meadow (photo by Helen Cook).

The diversity of birds and other wildlife recorded here is listed in greater detail in the appendices for the application for the meadow as a Local Green Space as compiled by Helen Cook. Species include Badger including several setts, hedgehogs, grass snakes (historically), greater spotted and green woodpecker, tawny owl, buzzards, sparrowhawks, kestrels, tawny owl, tree creeper, gold crest, wood mouse, pygmy shrew, at least two bat species, fox, palmate and common newts, great crested newts (historically), a good population of frogs and toads. Also in the Local Green Space application are approximately 325 moth species recordings by local naturalists. Local naturalists Allan and Jo Nolan have also provided a list of 65 bird species seen on the meadow and 20 species of butterfly. The rarity of these species in an urban environment enhances the importance of this site. These species thrive here because the land has been undisturbed.

The turf is pignut grassland, described by Michael Liley of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, as “unspoilt”. It includes a range of native plants associated with quality grassland and meadows, including Buttercups, meadow vetchling, pignut, cranesbills, clover species and plantain. Currently the land is grazed as grassland by a tenant farmer and the meadow flora would be improved if the land were cut seasonally more often in a hay meadow management pattern, as at the time of the name of the land in 1895 implies, “The meadows”. As George Peterken in his magisterial British Wildlife Publishing volume entitled “Meadows” explains, the nature of meadows are elastic and as suitable grasslands change their

management, whether animals are kept on them and for how much of the year, affects the time of year they are cut, they become more (or less) suited to hay production, i.e. more or less meadowlike, depending on these factors. Like all unspoilt semi-natural forms of landscape in the urban environment in the UK this is increasingly less commonly seen in urban contexts. This patch of ancient growth actually serves as a very important ecological link in the chain of habitats down to the Coalbourne brook and Dennis Park, if any link is lost, the ecological knock-on effect is amplified, since without continuity, the whole suffers irreparably.

Conclusions

As discussed in this paper, the historic roles Corbett Meadow has played in the history of Amblecote are numerous, as are the reasons for preserving its heritage.

These include the glass industry connections it has. It is the last surviving unchanged part of the Hill House estate, the former residence of the glass industrialists Thomas Rogers of Holloway End glassworks, and Richard Mills, of the Albert Glassworks, Wordsley. Corbett Meadow is seen from most of the windows of the grade II listed Dennis Hall, former home of Thomas Webb glassworks, still forming a part of its original vista. The value of Corbett Meadow is the sole surviving part of the grounds and park of the original hospital now gone; many glassworkers were treated medically in sight of the meadow. Thousands of glassworkers enjoyed the hospital fetes held on the turf annually for many decades, offering rare respite from industrial toil. Edward Webb repeatedly raised funds for this original hospital. The director of Stevens and Williams, J.S. Silvers-Williams helped run the hospital and grounds, including the meadow, for more than thirty years. These facts emphasise strong links between Corbett meadow and the historic glass industry. The role of Corbett Meadow in the landscape of the glass heritage of Stourbridge was clearly enduring and multi-faceted. It ought to be considered an important feature of the Glass Quarter and listed as such.

Archaeologically, it seems likely that the site of a mediaeval windmill yet survives in Corbett Meadow. The fact the meadow has never been ploughed means that it preserves a fragment of a mediaeval agricultural landscape, now almost gone from the parish.

The un-ploughed, ancient grassland and associated corridor of ecology in an urban context is also a rare thing in the Dudley area. If not built upon, there is a chance in the future that it may join the nearby Coalbourne brook habitat and become part of a significant urban nature reserve, helping to improve the ecology of this already congested area. All these things add much to the historic reasons for preserving the Corbett Meadow. Currently, due to economic pressure and a general lack of management, such as keeping the large pond free from being increasingly overshadowed by young saplings etc. this decreases the diversity of waterfowl, dragonflies, newts, fish etc. Therefore, Corbett meadow is temporarily facing a decrease in biodiversity. This suits those who wish to assess it for building housing. However, it clearly deserves to be preserved and properly maintained, for many different reasons.

As an unspoilt part of the history glass quarter and as an important local green space, it deserves a level of protection that it currently does not have. To see it disappear for the sake of building a few houses would be a move that could not be undone within our lifetimes. It ought to be listed and protected. Its unspoilt natural beauty was a key part of the gift by John Corbett, the “salt king.” According to the constitution and bylaws of the original 1893 hospital, that was completed while John Corbett was still alive, “The gardens and grounds belonging to the hospital may in the discretion of the Trustees be used for the

purposes of a public park.” The Corbett Meadow today represents the last vestige of this site that may yet be seen in its original condition today.

For these numerous ecological and historical reasons, this site deserves recognition as a space that needs as much protection as it can be afforded. In the “Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation Study Final Report October 2019 Client: Sandwell and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Councils” document, “local listing” is discussed on page 18, 3.2.6., stating that, “All four of the Black Country Authorities maintain a list of locally significant heritage assets. In most cases, entries on the lists refer to built heritage, but in some instances particular landscapes are recorded”. It seems reasonable, based on the accumulated evidence, that this is a landscape that may be deserving of being accorded a listed status, for all the environmental and historic reasons listed within this document.

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Township of Amblecote 1760 Map <https://www.dudley.gov.uk/residents/planning/historic-environment/historic-maps-of-dudley/>

Includes text and map with research by John Hemingway/Jennifer Foster 2006.

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