

CHAPTER 1: THE RURAL SCENE

LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL HISTORY

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The River Nene meanders across the broad Midland plain from its source west of Northampton but as it approaches Aldwincle and Wadenhoe the valley narrows as it cuts into a limestone ridge. It sweeps round in a wide loop between these two villages before dividing into two branches below Wadenhoe. Half a mile further downstream the two streams are united again before Lilford Lock. The Wadenhoe landscape (*Fig. 1*) is characterised by the river, valley meadows and marshes, and by the limestone upland which extends westwards to the former Rockingham Forest. The soils are mostly calcareous clays but the oolitic limestone is often close to the surface and has been widely exploited in the past for building stone. The origin of the name Wadenhoe is often said to be Wada's spur of a hill - Wada being a supposed Saxon or earlier chieftain. However, Waden is also old English for a ford across a river and I find it more convincing to think that 'Wadenhoe' means the ford by the hill, which accurately describes its position. The ford is still in use today.

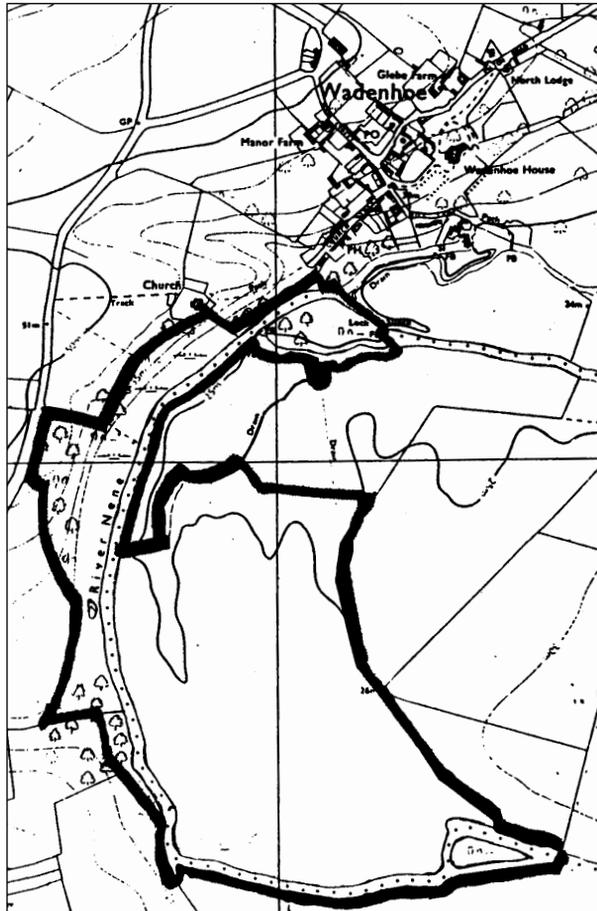
Fig. 1: Aerial photograph of Wadenhoe (reproduced by permission of Northamptonshire Heritage. Copyright: Northamptonshire County Council)



Wadenhoe parish is remarkably small compared with some of its neighbours. The east boundary is formed by the River Nene and is only a little over one mile. It then extends westwards for about two miles and only in the middle is it more than a mile wide. At the western end are the three woods of Wadenhoe Great Wood, Wadenhoe Little Wood and Lilford Wood. These survived as splendid oak/ash forests until after the Second World War when they were coniferised and lost their former glory. The Church is situated high above the river and separated from the village by Church Hill, the presumed fortified site of an ancient settlement. It has never been ploughed although there is much evidence of the land having been hand-dug for limestone in the past. The three fields west and north of the Church are collectively known as the Warren or Coniger. Ancient banks in this area are thought to be evidence of a deer park known to have existed in the 12th or 13th century. Some banks may have been used also to surround a managed rabbit warren but documentary confirmation is lacking.

Both sides of the river and the wooded scarp slope of the limestone ridge are included in the Wadenhoe Marsh Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) established by English Nature in 1970 and extended in 1984 (*Fig. 2*). On the Achurch side of the river a 75-acre meadow which occupies most of the valley floor contained by the wide loop in the river is one of the finest in the whole of the Nene Valley for its rich flora.

Fig. 2:
The Wadenhoe Marsh Site of Special Scientific Interest
(reproduced by permission
of Ordnance Survey)



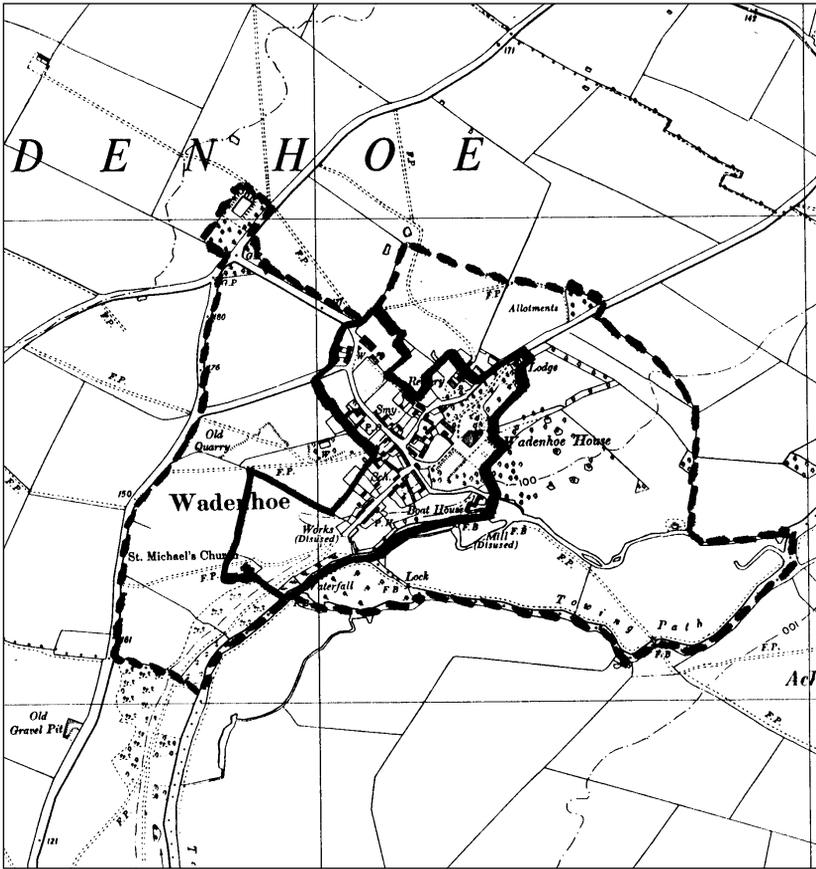


Fig. 3:
Wadenhoe Conservation area
existing boundary (1971):
with mooted extension
(1997).
(Reproduced by permission
of the Ordnance Survey)

Wadenhoe is designated a 'Restraint Village' or Conservation Area in the Northamptonshire County Strategy Plan but the boundary requires modification to include adjacent landscape features which are part of the charm and rural character of the village environment. There are also two areas of designated Open Land in the northwest part of the village which the District Council has proposed should remain unchanged (Fig. 3). Most of the village is owned by the Wadenhoe Trust. Its objectives include the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the village and its surroundings.

Some change is inevitable even in conservation villages but it is important that future development follows the policy guidelines of the County Strategy Plan and the objectives of the Wadenhoe Trust. In the last 25 years the village has become much more popular with visitors who like to follow the Nene Way long-distance footpath, to fish, paint, sit by the river, use the village hall or Kings Head, or walk over Church Hill to admire the view of the Nene Valley over 60 feet below. In 1996 the Wadenhoe Trust made an agreement with the Countryside Commission to allow public access to the whole of Church Hill and the fields beyond and Mrs Edna Ward Hunt has made a similar agreement for Holme Meadow. This is a great asset for visitors and emphasizes the importance of preserving open countryside around the village as well as the urban area. For this reason the Parish Council wish to enlarge the boundary of this Conservation Area which dates from 1971 and is overdue for revision.

The River Nene and oxbows

In 1860 Lord Lilford¹ described the river as ‘a deep, slow-moving, muddy, weedy stream producing pike, perch, eels, roach, carp, tench, dace, bream, ruffe, rudd, chub, bleak and gudgeon and very rarely a trout’. He knew the river well as he owned 12 miles of it with several tributaries and regularly shot wild duck and hunted with the otter hounds. His description is similar to how we would describe the river today but there are some major changes. In 1860 the urban population along the Nene Valley was small and Northampton was a market town. Today there has been a vast increase in the urban population and the river takes a large quantity of treated sewage. Old residents who can remember the river 50 or 60 years ago say it was always crystal clear but this is seldom achieved today. Most of the fish recorded by Lord Lilford in 1860 can be caught today although bleak are said to be scarce and I have not heard of ruffe being taken near Wadenhoe.

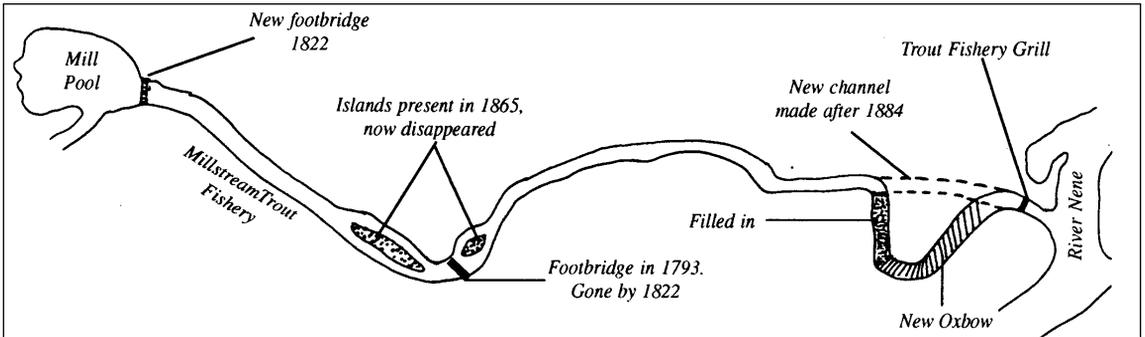
The marginal plant life along the river banks is dominated by reed sweet-grass, common club-rush and yellow iris. There is a small group of flowering rush but purple loosestrife, great willowherb and the bulrush are more frequent. The best of the oxbows, the Black Pool, is completely cut off from the main river. The marginal and aquatic plant life is richer here, with several species not known along the Achurch and Wadenhoe section of the river, notably the lesser water parsnip and greater bladderwort.

Fig. 4:
The Nene by the
‘Kings Head’



The 1793 and 1822 maps of Wadenhoe show that the millstream branch of the river (*Fig. 4*) had a slightly different shape at that time. There were two islands and the route was more convoluted. Just before the junction with the main river the millstream branch made a right-hand turn and followed a semicircular route (*Fig. 5*). Some time after the 1884 OS survey the channel had been straightened and the semicircle became a narrow overgrown oxbow. One wonders why it was considered necessary to go to the expense and trouble to do this, especially as the new channel would have been hand-dug. Perhaps it was to reduce flooding on the meadows.

Fig.5: The original course of the millstream.



In 1990 the millstream branch was made into a trout fishery. The weirs at the mill prevented trout moving upstream and a grill was constructed half a mile further down just before the junction with the main river. Both rainbow and brown trout were liberated. It was hoped that the latter would breed in the gravel bottom by the footbridge but the heavy load of silt and nutrients which promoted vigorous algal growth made this unlikely. The fishery has suffered during winter flooding when the grill has been damaged but the main difficulty is the control of excessive growth of aquatic plants in mid and late summer.

Most of the valley meadows in Wadenhoe Parish are of little botanical interest. Old residents can remember when they were flooded every winter but now this is much less common so that fertility is probably reduced. Some are treated with herbicides and artificial fertilisers to increase productivity but this reduces plant variety.

Nene Valley meadows

In striking contrast to these meadows is the 75-acre grassland in Achurch parish which forms part of the SSSI. Here well over 140 species of plants have been recorded and it is tempting to think that the neighbouring pastures were also as rich as this in the past. In the big meadow the season begins with a colourful display of cowslips, which are especially abundant where gravel soils occur. The pale mauve of the cuckooflower follows and the brilliant white of the meadow saxifrage and oxeye daisy. Many more plants join the carpet of colour as the season advances, especially dandelions, dropworts, knapweeds, meadowsweet, bedstraws, cranesbill, salad burnet and pepper saxifrage. During the alternate years when a hay crop is taken the flora can be seen at its best and the lack of disturbance enables many birds

to nest, especially redshanks, lapwings, snipe, wild duck and curlews. If Lord Lilford could return today one of the big surprises would be the large number of Canada and greylag geese which were unknown in the last century.

Wadenhoe marsh

This narrow strip of land lies at the foot of the limestone ridge forming a marshy zone fed by several springs. Some cease to flow during prolonged dry weather but much of the marsh remains wet. Although grazed by sheep or occasionally by cattle it is unlikely that any other use could have been made of this land. The 1822 map of the estate and the 1900 edition of the 25-inch Ordnance Survey map (1:2500) show scattered trees along the marsh where today there is alder woodland. Some of the old and well-rotted alder tree stumps are very large, suggesting long continuity and perhaps indicating the nature of the original vegetation.

If the maps quoted above accurately indicate a much more open landscape than today this may be because there was more regular grazing than has been the case in recent years. Cattle-grazing breaks up the coarse growth of sedges, reed and rushes, so that plants such as the ragged robin and the southern marsh orchid are able to flower. In recent years cattle have not been put onto this land and these two plants have disappeared. It may also be the cause of the disappearance of the bogbean in a marshy area, which is the only place where reed is dominant and where open places were previously created by cattle treading. These losses are probably only temporary and many plants will return with a change of use.

The scarp slope woodland

The scarp slope above the river marshes is now bush-covered with a few larger scattered trees, mainly ash. Most of the growth consists of hawthorn and elder, usually the first trees to invade pasture which has been unused or neglected at some time in the past. The present scrub woodland has probably persisted for a considerable time as bluebells and dog's mercury, typical woodland plants, are established though not widespread. It is a wonderful area to explore and can only improve with time as more forest trees become established. As it is part of the SSSI there is a case for speeding up this process by careful tree planting.

Church Hill

This steep-sided archaeological site is thought to be a natural feature formed by stream erosion on the north side. However, there is some evidence of human intervention to strengthen the perimeter, perhaps by a small settlement in the past. There have been many conflicting views about its origin (*see Chapter 2*), including some which question the existence of any archaeological interest. Small excavations many years ago to find building stone have left scars and irregular surfaces which perhaps hide or have even destroyed signs of human settlement.

The rough and uneven surface of Church Hill may have prevented exploitation by ploughing. It has been grazed by horses, cattle and sheep in the past but, on the advice of the County archaeologists, it is now agreed that sheep-grazing will do least damage to the surface and no cattle or horses will be permitted in the future. Hard grazing removes so much of the vegetation that recording the plant life is often difficult. However, throughout much of the summers of 1996 and 1997 there were long periods when no grazing took place and the vegetation flowered as never before. There were yellow carpets of bird's foot trefoil and lady's bedstraw, red poppies appeared for the first time in years, and everywhere the drooping red flowers of the musk thistle attracted more butterflies than had been seen for 20 years, including brown argus, Essex skipper, comma, common and holly blues. The six-banded clearwing moth was recorded for the first time, as was that strange umbellifer, the knotted hedge parsley.

Rural churchyards are often interesting places for plants and animals because between the graves the grassland is permanent and old stone walls provide a habitat for many forms of wildlife. When I first moved to Wadenhoe in 1974 the churchyard was a great place to see glowworms on warm June nights. At that time the grass cover was cut only irregularly and the longish grass suited these strange insects. Each year we took friends up to the Church to see them and usually recorded eight or nine. In later years the gates were opened to allow sheep in to graze the grass. The sward was kept too short and gradually the glowworms disappeared and have not been seen there since at least 1993.

The parish is well endowed with hedges, many of which are in good shape and attractive to insects and birds. On the other hand they generally have few woody species and this may be because in 1793 when the Enclosure Award was made 675 acres (out of a total of about 1200 acres) were 'Common and Open Fields, Commonable Land and Waste' so that for half of the parish many hedges may have been planted after this date. New hedges have few woody plants but in the course of time new species arrive at the rate of approximately one per hundred years, although this varies according to location. Hawthorn and blackthorn are by far the commonest shrubs but elder and coppice ash are very frequent and in some places elm suckers. The most varied hedgerows, and probably the oldest, are along the Aldwinle-Oundle Road, which passes through the parish. In addition to the plants mentioned above there are many coppice field maple, purging buckthorn and a little hazel. A rare species which is represented by two plants in this hedge is the barberry, although a second plant grows elsewhere in the parish. Often mixed with blackthorn is wild plum, an introduced species but well established in the countryside. In Wadenhoe it is more common in garden hedgerows, for example, between Cergne House and the Kings Head, at the back of Navisford

Hedgerows and trees

House garden and between Dyke End and No. 31 Church Street. To the west of the village, opposite Wadenhoe Lodge, is a complete hedgerow of wild plums, much sought-after by local people. The dark fruit is the size of a greengage and makes excellent jam or tarts. There are several crabapple trees in the Aldwincle-Oundle hedgerows and these may also have been planted.

The 1822 map of the Thomas Welch Hunt estate shows trees in very many of the hedgerows, especially those along roads. Today there are few left and it is not known whether those remaining represent the whole range of species which were planted in the early 19th century. Again there is not much variety. Ash and sycamore are the most common but it is possible that elm was also widespread but died in the early 1970s of Dutch elm disease. There are many places, especially along the Pilton Road, where there is abundant regrowth of elm suckers. Oak trees still survive but are less common. In the river valley there are many fine alders, white willows and poplars, although some are 'stagheaded' and nearing the end of their life.

The villagers of Wadenhoe, in the past, were obviously fond of walnuts because many were planted in and around the urban area. The largest and oldest is probably the tree in the old stone quarry behind Manor Farm and a frequent nest site for the little owl. A young walnut was planted on the Green in 1977 to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee and to replace the old tree which gave shade on this children's play area at the beginning of the century.

Elsewhere in the village are several large horse chestnuts, near the footbridge by the ford and in the spinneys where Wadenhoe Lane meets the Aldwincle Road and in the Wadenhoe House Park. A fine hybrid lime avenue grows along the south side of the Green and is perhaps 80 years old. However, it is not marked on the 6-inch OS map which is based on surveys prior to 1930. In 1994 an avenue of 16 hornbeams was planted along the track from the Church to the Aldwincle Road to commemorate George Ward Hunt's service over many years to the village and villagers.

Finally Wadenhoe used to have mistletoe growing on a small hawthorn in the park but it died in recent years. A much bigger plant grew on a hawthorn in the paddock by the Mill, but this too no longer exists, the tree having been cut down and burnt in 1996. At present mistletoe is not known in the parish but if found should be carefully noted as it is scarce in the East Midlands. It is not generally known that all trees within the village Conservation Area are protected by law.

Birds and animals

Lord Lilford's comments on the birds recorded in the Lilford-Wadenhoe area have been of great interest in assessing the changes since 1860. There is no doubt that before mechanisation when all farming activities were done by hand and before pesticides and artificial fertilisers were available, many farmland habitats were more favourable to wildlife. In 1888 Lord Lilford wrote that 'meadows were swarming with landrails (corncrakes)', a bird which has been long extinct in Northamptonshire. In 1892 he noted 'we have a great many

hawfinches nesting close to the house'. In 1875: 'There are no end of nightingales, numerous corncrakes and more wood warblers than I ever knew before'. During 23 years living in Wadenhoe I myself have never seen or heard hawfinches, nightingales or wood warblers, though occasional birds may pass through the area and they do occur elsewhere in the county. At the time Lord Lilford was writing Wadenhoe Great Wood, Wadenhoe Little Wood and Lilford Wood, all within the parish, must have been fine deciduous woodlands and much better habitats for the forest birds mentioned above than are the coniferous plantations of recent years. Lord Lilford also described the lesser spotted woodpecker as the most common of the three British species. Today it is the least common, while the green and greater spotted are frequently seen.

Bird protection laws were unknown in Lord Lilford's day and he enjoyed shooting as much as anyone. In the mid 19th century he records the nests of the red kite in Wadenhoe Great Wood and near Barnwell, and eggs being taken as well as a fine kite shot over Aldwinckle. As one might expect, it soon became extinct in the county as a breeding species. In the 1990s red kites from Spain were liberated not far from Oundle to try to re-establish the species after an absence of over 100 years. They are occasionally seen over Wadenhoe and three nests were reported in northeast Northamptonshire in 1997.

Protection has greatly changed the status of many birds which were rare or unknown in Lord Lilford's day. The great crested grebe is a familiar bird today but was shot for its plumes to adorn ladies' hats in the 19th century. The redshank was a very scarce bird but now is a familiar sight in the Nene flood meadows. Seagulls and terns were rarely seen inland 100 years ago but are common today, the former mainly as winter visitors and the common tern breeding on islands at the nearby Titchmarsh Local Nature Reserve. The kingfisher was often shot in pre-protection days because it was small and flew fast and so a real test for the marksman. Today it is protected and always a delight to those who see it. Lord Lilford would also be astonished to see oystercatchers and shelduck, typical shorebirds which have moved inland and breed in small numbers not far from Wadenhoe.

In May 1885 Lord Lilford recorded that 'The otter hounds were here on Saturday but did not find until they got to Wadenhoe'. Otters were still frequent along the Nene in the late 19th century and did not disappear from the English Midlands until the mid 20th century. Today it is protected and recent introductions have been made in an attempt to re-establish it along the Nene and its tributaries. In many areas, including the Nene Valley, the otter's place has been taken by the North American mink, which since escaping from fur farms in the 1950s has colonised vast areas of Britain. The Otter Hounds are now renamed as Mink Hounds, but I wonder what the dogs would do if they came across one of the newly liberated otters: I am sure old instincts would prevail. The mink is a highly efficient predator and two creatures have suffered severely along the Wadenhoe Nene. In 1974 the water vole was often seen by the river but within three years of the arrival of the mink it had disappeared. Its small size made it the perfect prey.

prey. Similarly the little grebe nested frequently in riverside vegetation and it too was decimated by mink depredation.

Another small mammal, now unknown, occurred in the Lilford area in 1895, when three were killed. This is the polecat, which Lord Lilford said he could remember when they were nearly as common as stoats. He comments in 1895 that no (pine) martens had been killed in Northants for 10 to 12 years and that 70 years ago they were 'quite common in the forest of Rockingham'.

Lord Lilford does not mention butterflies in his books but we know from the Ashton estate not far away, where the Hon. Miriam Rothschild has kept careful records for many years, that the number of species has greatly declined during the last half-century. In the case of Ashton this is surprising because the deciduous woodland is still there, though the management may be different today. Much of this change elsewhere is due to modern agricultural technology, which has destroyed wildlife habitats - for example hedge removal, use of pesticides, coniferisation of woodland and use of fertilisers to increase productivity. However, some butterfly populations fluctuate erratically from year to year and the reasons for this are not understood. The summer of 1997 proved to be exceptionally good because of the very warm August weather.

Change in the countryside is inevitable, much being a reflection of remarkable advances in agricultural technology. Unfortunately this has also led to greater uniformity in the landscape and reduced habitat diversity, so that even common birds such as the skylark have declined in numbers. Much has been accomplished to reverse this trend by the creation of nature reserves and agreements with sympathetic farmers by English Nature and MAFF (Countryside Stewardship Scheme) to retain hedgerows and ponds and to plant trees. In some instances it has been possible to create wildlife areas in field corners difficult to cultivate, as has been done at Stoke Doyle by Bob Gent. He has also been able to delay stubble ploughing until the spring so that flocks of finches and buntings can feed on the abundant weed seeds. Similarly, Chris Brawn at Achurch has an agreement to manage his splendid 75-acre meadow by the River Nene so that the rich flora and birdlife can be preserved.

It is hoped that future plans might envisage a survey of the whole parish, which only includes about 1200 acres, to identify the potential for more conservation work which could be done without inconvenience to landowners or occupiers.

Footpaths are best ways from one place to another: from house to house, from farm to village, and from one village to the next. They usually take the most direct route, but often have to make do with a longer one to avoid bad or impassable ground. There is always a good reason for them: to link A with B. No footpath was ever created just for the fun of it. Some appear now to have no logic, wandering to nowhere in particular. But if you check their history you are almost certain to find there used to be a somewhere: perhaps a farm or a cottage or a hovel which has since been demolished. Some landowners and farmers would prefer that there were no footpaths and some even try to have them closed. They can be a thorn in the flesh. But in this long-privatised island of ours, and particularly in a county such as Northamptonshire which historically possesses next to no common land, these public rights-of-way are necessary. They are essential arteries to allow the great majority of us who do not own the land to have access to the countryside. In short, footpaths are a democratic necessity.

Wadenhoe is typical in its network of paths. In its parish area of just under 1200 acres there are 14 altogether, codified by Northamptonshire County Council under the letters 'PB' (Aldwinckle is 'MC', Pilton 'NN'). They leave the village in every compass direction except South - the reason for this being the River Nene, which acts as a natural unfordable barrier. Some are short, some long. PB14 merely crosses the Green, whilst PB1 links the village (via the Drift Road) to Lyveden New Bield, a run of over two miles. PB11 takes us on our way to Aldwinckle - at the parish boundary it suddenly turns into MC2 - whilst PB12 takes us over the river (twice) to Achurch. PB6 and PB7 cross each other behind the Glebe, whilst PB5 runs from the Green to the Oundle Road, where it meets PB8 to take us on to New Plantation and (via NN6) to Bearshanks Lane. PB3 and PB10 are routes to St Michael's and All Angels Church, standing as it does in a field remote from the village. Two footpaths follow the parish boundary, as though staking it out. PB9 runs along the inside hedge from Tom-Tom's Corner past Aldwinckle Lodge before making a cross-field diversion to Wadenhoe Great Wood, after which it joins PB1 on its way to Lyveden, whilst MC11 follows the boundary hedge from Tom-Tom's Corner to the Aldwinckle Road. (As it runs on the Aldwinckle side of the hedge it is technically in Aldwinckle Parish, hence the MC prefix.) Five circular routes² using these footpaths are described in detail below.

The village rights-of-way have intermittently concerned the Parish Meeting over the years. On 22 February 1934, the Meeting furnished the County Council with a list of 'roads, lanes and pathways comprising the 'Rights of Way' in the Parish'. The 11 listed all tally with our present paths except two: the Green Lane, i.e. the 'Drift' (or Drover's) Road, which starts from Oundle Road and eventually leads to Lowick, and the Bridle Road through Long Close from Wadenhoe Lane to Lilford Wood. The Green Lane was reclassified after the 1968 Countryside Act as a 'Byway open to all traffic', so it no longer counts

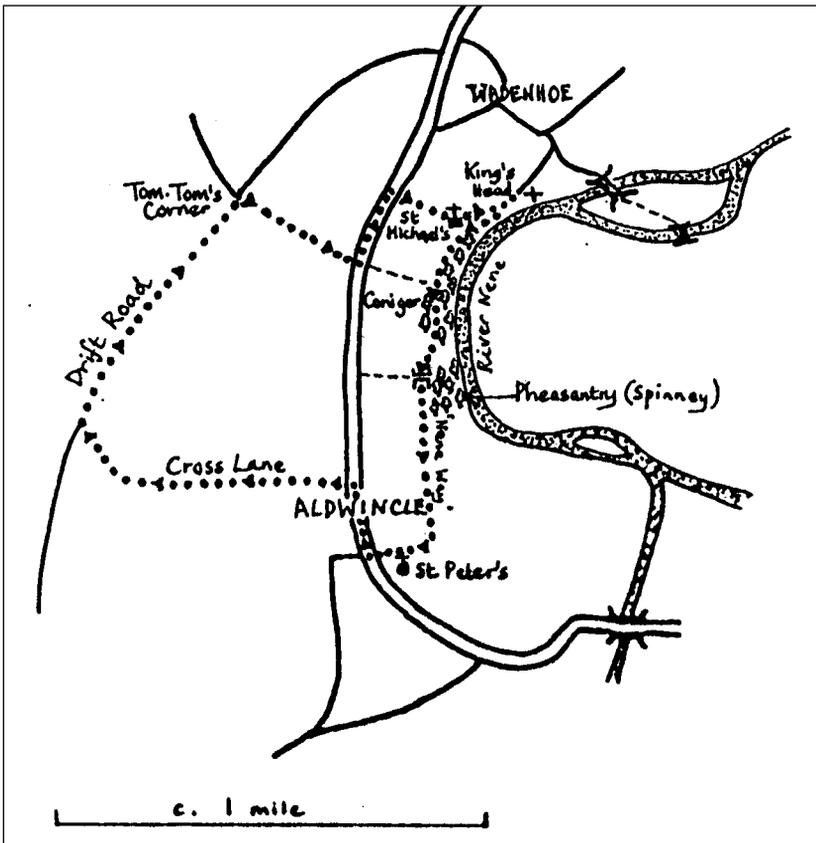
as a footpath/bridleway. The Bridle Road is another matter and seems to be a public right-of-way that we have lost. I remember Ted Briggs, unofficial 'Keeper of the Village Lore', telling me in the early 1970s that when he was a 'little old boy' this was a public right-of-way. It seems perfectly logical, as there is a straight run from gate to gate through three different fields. And Ted - and indeed some old maps - called the field 'Waypost Close'. We may have officially lost this one, but many of us villagers still use it unofficially. (Perhaps we should try and make it official?)

On the other hand, since 1934 we have gained another, admittedly less interesting, path, PB6, which traverses the fields from the Glebe to the Oundle-Aldwinckle Road. Why, I cannot think; it serves no apparent purpose, landing the walker as it does at an anonymous spot halfway along a main road, without the linking footpath you might expect to take it on across field to Bearshanks Lane. This extra path was probably trawled out of the memory of a villager when the definitive footpath map was drawn up after the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, which made it a duty of each County to survey rights-of-way in its area.

Some footpaths have been diverted, on purpose or by what might be called 'natural selection'. One of the latter is PB3, which officially begins on the Aldwinckle Road some 20 yards south of the present cattle-grid into Windmill Hill, and runs to Wadenhoe Church by way of the site of the old windmill. The replacement of this by the present track seems to have been relatively recent, for at the same Parish Meeting referred to earlier (February 1934) the Rector, Rev. B.H. Dawson, proposed that Northamptonshire County Council be asked 'to construct a carriage road in place of the pathway leading from the Aldwinckle Road to the Church'. This proposal was unanimously adopted. It seems a perfectly logical replacement for the previous straggling route, though the Definitive Map still opts for the old footpath. This would mean that the 'carriage road' is unofficial, a 'permitted path' which could theoretically be withdrawn at any time by the landowner, Mrs Ward Hunt. A diversion 'on purpose' has been made within the last decade, when the County's long-distance footpath, the Nene Way, was devised. The planners, sensibly, realised that the original, time-honoured route linking Wadenhoe with Aldwinckle, which runs close to the river, would be impracticable for the hundreds of walking boots and wellies expected during the winter months, and so they raised it 50 yards uphill to a terrace on the side of the Coniger. This new path is a welcome addition to our network of footpaths, giving as it does some wonderful, hitherto publically unavailable views across the Nene Valley to Achurch. But it should be emphasised that this is an 'extra', not a replacement. The original path, which runs alongside Wadenhoe Marsh, the alder carr and the reedbeds, is still an official footpath, and to birdwatcher and fisherman an absolutely essential public right-of-way which must never be relinquished.

**Wadenhoe Walk
No. 1:
Coniger/Aldwincle
Drift Road**

Fig. 6



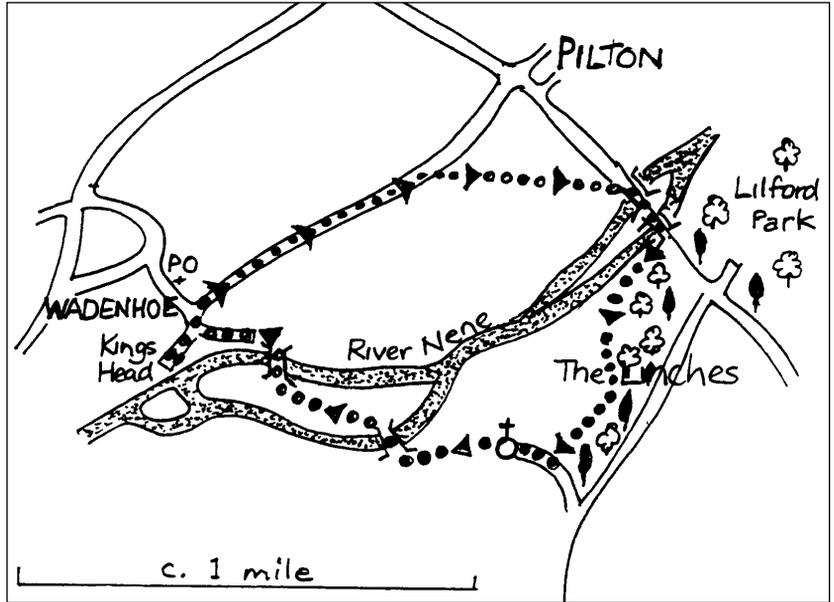
This is a walk of about five miles, not very taxing although, like all local walks between September and April, muddy in places. It should take no more than two hours. Wellingtons or walking boots will be needed.

We begin and end - as always - at the Kings Head. If you start out at about 10.30 a.m. you'll be back in time for a lunchtime drink. Proceed down the hill to Church Field gate and follow the Nene Way signs (well-marked with planks over streams), along the alder carr, through the kissing-gate, up from the marsh and over the 'Warren' to the new stile at the Aldwincle-Wadenhoe parish boundary fence. You are now on the 'Coniger'. The Coniger - like the Warren denoting an ancient rabbit preserve, possibly medieval - is now a sloping hillside overgrown with elder, and the new track through it is well-endowed with puddles and cowpats. When you reach the open stretch of marsh by the river, look back to Wadenhoe: saddle-backed St Michael's and All Angels on the ridge, the village houses clustered beyond it; Achurch spire and Brawn's farm on the opposite side of the valley. Cross the stream by a hand-railed footbridge, the Pheasantry to your left; ahead of you Aldwincle St Peter's spire, below you the great Aldwincle loop of the Nene. Continue along the hedges at the bottom of Aldwincle gardens until you meet a signpost. Here turn right along a wall-enclosed path, Old Rectory to your left, barn conversions (1989) to your right, and cross the paddock into Main Street. Turn right, then left at Cross Lane. At the junction of Cross Lane and the Drift Road ('Green Lane') turn right uphill through some formidable puddles to

puddles to Tom-Tom's Corner, a five-way crossroad: to your left, the farm track to Aldwincle Lodge; half-left the bridle-track to Great Wood; ahead of you the metalled road to Wadenhoe. Take none of these, but turn right onto the footpath which follows the Aldwincle-Wadenhoe parish boundary hedge to the Oundle Road. At Special Constable's Paddock (invariably at least one horse at grass), turn left along the metalled road for 100 yards or so till you reach the gravelled track to St Michael and All Angels Church. (Alternatively there is a footpath, PB3, just before this, but as it isn't waymarked it is hard to spot.) Proceed through the churchyard, noting as you always should the remarkable collection of box tombs, down Church Hill and back to your starting-point.

**Wadenhoe Walk
No. 2:
The Lynches
Circular**

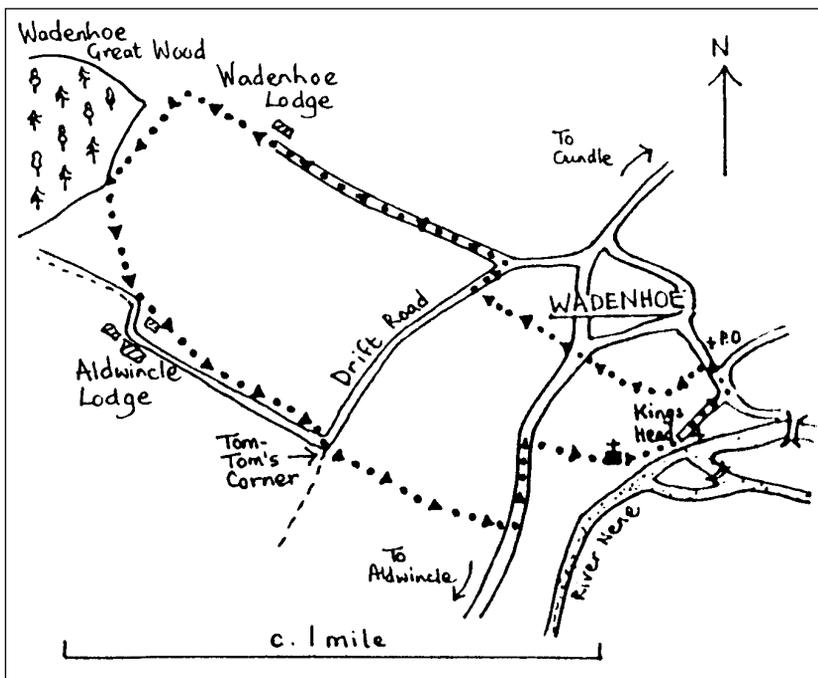
Fig. 7



This is a walk of about three miles: give yourself one and a half hours and if it is wet wear walking boots or wellingtons.

We begin and end again at the Kings Head. The best direction is clockwise (though if you're perverse and want to go anti-, read this guide backwards). Proceed along Pilton Lane as far as the last field on your right before Pilton crossroads. Take the footpath on your right at this point which runs diagonally across two fields, past an old quarry/fishpond to the road-gate near the river. Cross the two river bridges - with luck you may see a kingfisher or heron or both - and start walking uphill past the 'Keep Out' signs till you meet the Nene Way sign. Turn right here following the Nene Way which tracks upwards through the wood called The Lynches. The Lynches used to be a fine old wood. The Forestry Commission cropped it and replanted, but fortunately with deciduous trees as well as conifers. So, passing between sycamores and boxes (a speciality hereabouts) you rise uphill with expanding views to your right of the River Nene and its overflows as it approaches the weir and locks of Lilford. In about a quarter of a mile, follow the handrail and steps up to an open riding. At the cross-

ride, turn right along a broad riding to Achurch village. When you reach tarmac, turn right again towards the Church. On a fine day, there is no more picturesque view than from the lychgate of Achurch St John the Baptist over the valley to Wadenhoe House, with the gilt weathervane on Achurch spire flashing in the sunlight. Raise yourself from your reveries and follow the footpath through the churchyard, bearing left to a stile. From the stile you get another fine view, of the whole of Wadenhoe village and its Church, with river and millstream snaking below. The footpath then cuts diagonally across the field: aim for the two horse chestnuts. This will give you a line to the next stile. Cross Black Bridge and, taking a line on Wadenhoe House, cross the meadow. Turn left at the millstream to White Bridge, up Mill Lane and (if you've timed it correctly), the open doors of the Kings Head.



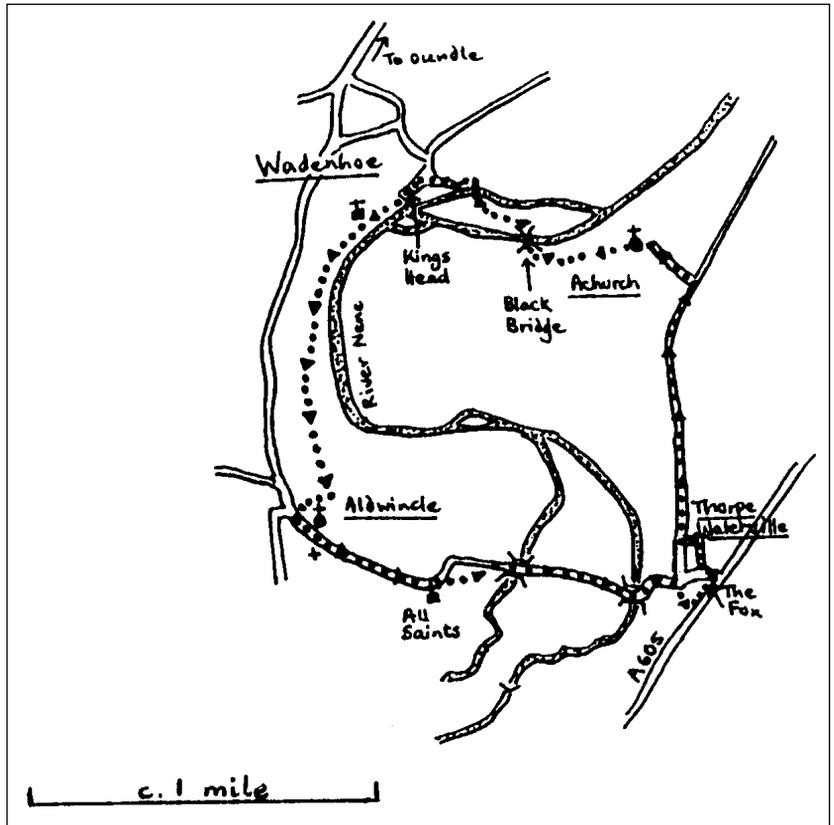
**Wadenhoe Walk
No. 3:
The Lodges
Circular**
Fig. 8

This walk is about three and a half miles in length, so give yourself one and a half to two hours to do it in leisurely comfort. The first part takes us along the recently designated Lyveden Way. It is a good walk for hedgerows, particularly in the blackberry season.

From our base (the Kings Head) proceed up Church Street, left up Main Street until you reach the footpath access on your left into Quarry Field. Skirt the top of the old quarry, noting the ancient walnut and Cox's apple on your right. At the end of the quarry, turn diagonally right to the stile into another old quarry and across to a sunken grotto (remarkable for icicles in frosty weather). From the top of the grotto, walk diagonally across the field to the stile at the corner of the Aldwinckle Road. Cross the road into Three-Corner Ground and follow the hedgeside to the Drift Road. Here turn right for 100 yards till you see the Lyveden bridleway sign. Follow the cart-road past Wadenhoe Lodge on your right, then down a thickly-hedged track to a brook. This

old trackway eventually leads to Lyveden New Bield via Lilford Wood - but that's another walk (Wadenhoe Walk No. 5). We take it only as far as the brook and then turn left along a grass track which skirts the edge of Wadenhoe Great Wood. You can often see fallow deer, many of them with very dark fur, grazing in the fields. After about a quarter of a mile you will pass a wide riding through Great Wood on your right. Ignore this and continue on for a few yards to a bridle-gate (a metal one: a great mistake - it should, of course, be wood). From here the bridleway cuts diagonally across the field. You'll have to judge this as best you can, but if you take an electricity pole amongst trees on the opposite hedge as a guide, you won't be far wrong. From here, follow the hedge-line to the latch-gate at Tom-Tom's Corner. (Warning: there is, to date, no proper bridle-gate at the hedge half-way down this field. Cross the barbed wire as best you can until NCC rectify the situation.) At Tom-Tom's Corner continue straight ahead along the footpath which runs alongside the Wadenhoe-Aldwinckle boundary hedge to Special Constable's Paddock and the Aldwinckle-Oundle Road. Turn left until you reach the cattle-grid onto Windmill Hill: through the churchyard, down Church Hill, and - lo! - the Kings Head again.

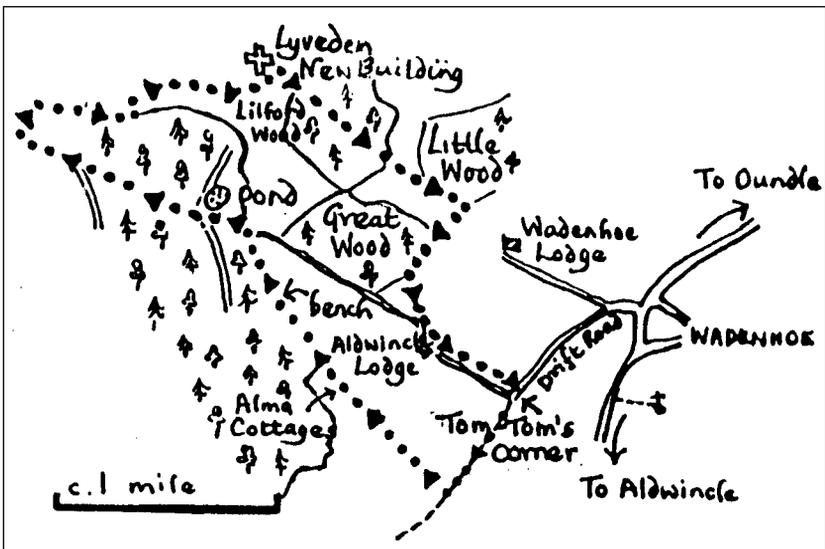
**Wadenhoe Walk
No. 4:
Round the River**
Fig. 9



This walk is adapted from one organised by the Ramblers Association for a rally at Wadenhoe. It is about six miles in length and takes in several places of historical interest, so it is best suited for a leisurely day's outing, though (if you must) you can make a brisk morning's walk of it. It entails a little road walking, but nothing unpleasant or dangerous.

From our Kings Head base, proceed along the Nene Way to Aldwinckle. This is a well-marked footpath, but see the Wadenhoe Walk No. 1 for details. Enter Aldwinckle village by St Peter's Church and at the main road turn left, taking the road to Thorpe Waterville. As you leave Aldwinckle, you pass All Saints Church and its old Rectory, the birthplace of the poet John Dryden. All Saints, declared redundant in 1976, is well worth a visit: a list of keyholders is pinned to the North door. From here a footpath cuts out the dangerous dog-leg bend in the road, leading you back to the road just before Brancey Bridge. If you peep over the left hand parapet you will see the dating-stone, 1760, on the arch. You are now on the ancient Causeway, with its elevated footpath for use during flooding, to your right the old gravel workings, now new-made lakes housing greylags and Canada geese (and in winter, if you're lucky, Bewick swans). Continue along the Causeway over the main Nene stream (the Staunches) to Thorpe Waterville. To your right is the site of an ancient 'castle'; all that remains is the magnificent banqueting hall. A footpath crosses in front of this to the main Oundle-Thrapston Road. Turn left and in a few yards you reach the Fox, which makes a good halfway lunch-stop.

Go back into the village, taking the 'Gipsy Lane' to Achurch. The wide grass verges are a favourite camping spot for Romanies, as they give plenty of tethering-space for their ponies. At Achurch you will pass, on your left, the row of estate cottages, and, on your right, the memorial well to Thomas Atherton Powys, the eldest son of the 4th Baron ('Bird') Lilford, who died aged 21 in 1882. At the War Memorial, turn left along the lane to the Church of St John the Baptist. This again is well worth a visit, containing as it does memorials to the Powys family, including several transferred from Lilford Church when it was demolished in the late 18th century. The view from the churchyard across the Nene valley to Wadenhoe is (to my mind) one of the finest in the county. From the churchyard take the footpath back to Wadenhoe and the Kings Head.



**Wadenhoe Walk
No. 5:
A Visit to
Lyveden**
Fig. 10

This, our final walk, is slightly longer than usual, so I'll dispense with preliminaries and start and end not at the Kings Head but at Tom-Tom's Corner (i.e. the 'crossroads' where the Drift Road meets the turn to Aldwincle Lodge). Proceed down the Green Lane until you see a waymarker on your right. This points the way to an ancient track called Padney Lane, which used to give access to a now-vanished settlement called Alma Cottages. Some older villagers may remember these habitations, and their name tells us that they could not have been built before 1854 (the date of the Battle of Alma, a famous British victory in the Crimean War). Today all that remains of human presence is a pond. *Sic transit*, as they say. The right-of-way begins along the field edge until it reaches a wide 'spinney'. At the top of the hill it begins to descend with Souther Wood to your left, farmland to your right. Halfway down, the County Council have imaginatively provided a bench (which will sit three or four) so that you can admire the view across the valley to the ruins of Lyveden New Bield, our destination.

When you reach the forestry road, turn left and continue on for a mile through the plantations, past the goldfish pond on your right, ignoring any seductive ridings to either side, till you leave the trees on the track towards Cherry Lap coppice. In a few yards you will see a footpath sign on your right indicating the 'Lyveden Way'. Take this and follow the signs all the way to Lyveden New Bield. This splendid 'conceit in stone' was built in the early 17th century as a 'summer house' by the recusant Catholic nobleman, Sir Thomas Tresham. Like Triangular Lodge (Rushton) it is a symbol of his Catholic faith: in this case of the Passion, cross-shaped with appropriate texts and motifs round the walls. It is a remarkable building with an extraordinary atmosphere, well worth a long lunch stop.

From Lyveden, take the bridle-track across field and down the central riding of Lilford Wood. When the wood ends, continue across field to a footbridge over a stream till you join the track to Wadenhoe Lodge. Turn right at this track with Wadenhoe Little Wood to your immediate left and continue till you reach another stream. Do not proceed on to Wadenhoe Lodge, but turn right to skirt the bottom of Wadenhoe Great Wood, and take the track to and past Aldwincle Lodge back to Tom-Tom's Corner. (The last part of this walk is explained in detail in Wadenhoe Walk No. 3.)

Field names³

On 2 November 1973, the late Ted Briggs listed all the field names that he knew for the Parish of Wadenhoe. These were later checked against those handwritten onto Selby's post-enclosure map of the district (1822) in the Estate Office. Some were quite different - Long Field (Briggs) = Waypost Close (Selby) - but many were recognisably the same. Surprisingly few had changed their shape over the last 150 years; we have been lucky to escape the large-scale field amalgamations which have taken place in other parts of the East Anglian region. For anyone working in the fields, these names are essential for everyday communication. But even for those who don't, it gives added interest to our walks if we know them. *Figure 11* is a map of the local fields with the key below, the names given me by Ted Briggs in the first column, those on the Selby map in the second.

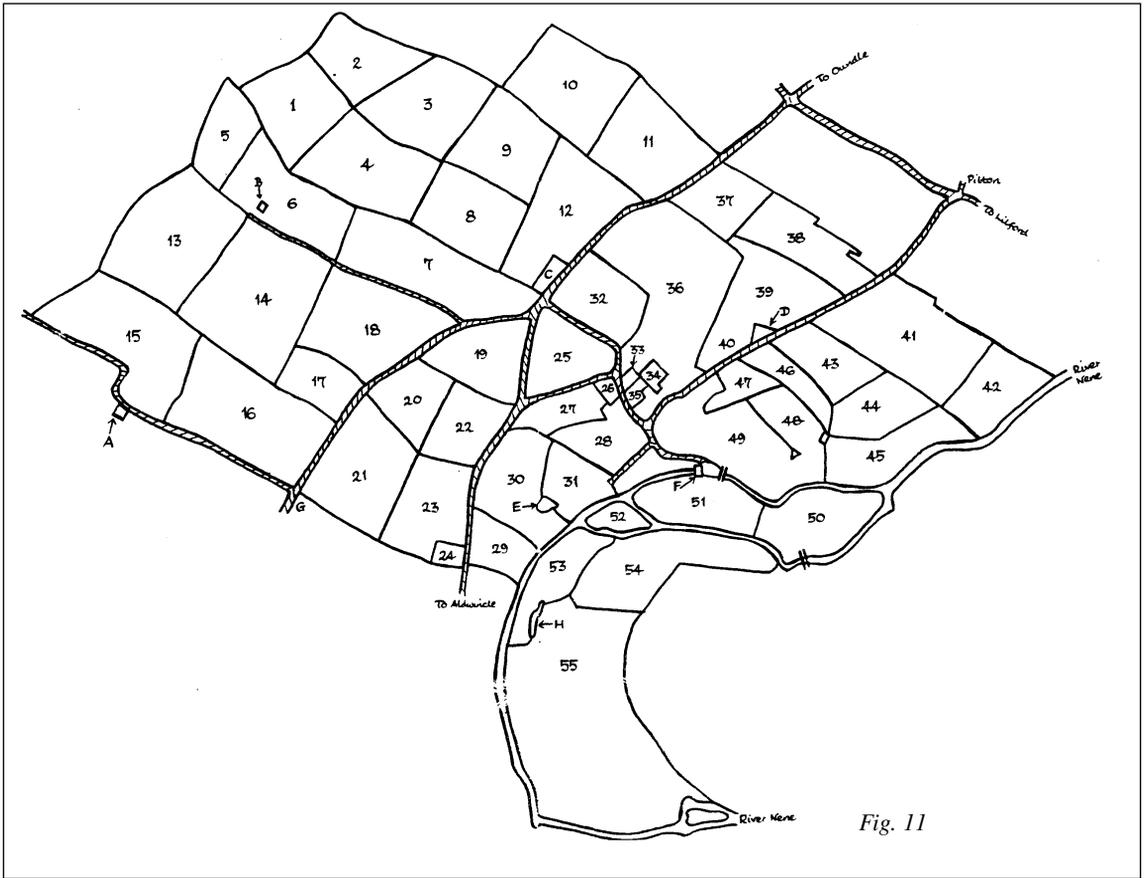


Fig. 11

Briggs (1973)

1. West Pasture
2. North Pasture
3. East Pasture
4. South Pasture
5. Top Pasture
6. Bottom Pasture
7. Long Field
8. 8-acre
9. 8-acre
10. Tresmass Corner (top)
11. Tresmass Corner (bottom)
12. Thistle Long
13. Wood Piece
14. 6-acre
15. Top barn Close
16. Bottom Barn Close
17. Butcher's Close
18. Seed Ground
19. 3-cornered Field
20. Seed Ground

Selby (1822)

- ditto
ditto
ditto
ditto
Wood Pasture
Long Pasture
Waypost Close
Lower Hasland
Hasland Field
Trespass Corner
Trespass Corner
ditto
ditto
Avenue Field
Barn Close
Barn Close
ditto
Upper Two Gates
3-cornered Ground
Seed Close

Briggs (1973)

21. Great Close
22. 10-acre
23. Windmill Hill
24. Special Constable's Paddock
25. Twenty Lands
26. (Paddock)
27. Manor Farm Leys
28. Home Farm Leys
29. Manor Farm (Swiffin's Warren)
30. Home Farm Warren
31. Childs' Warren (Church Field)
32. Milking Ground
33. Playground
34. Swiffin's Paddock
35. (no name)
36. Home Close
37. White Heavylands

Selby (1822)

- Uddermuster
Windmill Hill Field
Windmill Hill Field
Stretton's Close
ditto
(no name)
Upper Cold Croft Leys
Nether Cold Croft Leys
Far Warren
Middle and Near Warren
Church Hill
Milking Close
(no name)
Mouse's Close
Brown's Close
ditto
White Heavy Lands

Briggs (1973)	Selby (1822)	Briggs (1973)	Selby (1822)
39. Stonepit Fields	Middle Fullers and Stump Close	48. Spring Leys	Gravelpit Close
40. (Paddocks)	Townend Close	49. The Park	Spring Leys, Meadow and The Paddock
41. Seed Field	Nether Field	50. Manor Farm Meadow	Meadow
42. Seed Field	Meadow	51. Home Farm Meadow	Meadow
43. 10-acre	Home Nether Field	52. Little Lake	(no name)
44. Nursery Close	Nether Field	53. Big Lake	(no name)
45. The Medder	Nursery Meadow	54. Chew's Meadow	(no name)
46. Dyke Close	Long Field	55. Big Meadow	(no name)
47. The Paddock	4-acre Close		

A Aldwincle Lodge; **B** Wadenhoe Lodge;
C Reservoir; **D** 'The Spinneys'; **E** Church;
F Mill; **G** Tom-Tom's Corner; **H** Black Pool.

FARMING IN WADENHOE

I was born in the tiny village of Wigsthorpe on 29 June 1891. There were ten of us all told, six boys and four girls. My father was a horse-keeper for the Lilford Estate. This entailed feeding, looking after and working heavy farm-horses - there were no mechanical methods of farming in those days, only the powerful steam-plough-engines. We went to school at Lilford. I started there when I was three and a half and left when I was 11.

My first job was as a general boy on the farm - as you might term it today, the 'tea-boy'; you were at everybody's beck and call. You would go with an old boy with a scythe. He would do a bit of mowing and you would have a fork and shake the swathe to help it dry out. In the spring, when they were hoeing the corn by hand, someone had to go and get a gallon of beer: that was always the boy's job (a gallon for a shilling from the pub at Clapton).

The only method we had of travelling, before the bicycle, was a horse and trap owned by a cottager in the village. He used to go into Thrapston every Tuesday, Oundle market every Thursday, and you could fix yourself up a ride from him for sixpence. You were at his convenience as to when you came back - sometimes he'd be drunk! But it didn't matter whether he was drunk or sober, the old horse knew the way - and would stop when you wanted to get off!

My first visit to Oundle was when I got knocked down by a bull and my father had to hire the horse and trap to take me into the doctor's surgery to be examined. The doctor set my collar-bone there and then without any anaesthetic. On entering Oundle the streets were all decorated with bunting. When we asked what it was for, they said that Mafeking had been relieved. Another early visit was in a horse-drawn waggon to hear the proclamation of King Edward VII.

When I started work, I got paid three bob a week. Dad used to draw it. We never handled it, not until we earned nine shillings a week. Our wages used to increase a shilling a year, if we were worth it! And when we got to earn nine shillings, my mother used to give us back sixpence. She kept the rest for board. Out of that sixpence we used to buy our own shoes and clothes. Of course we used to earn a little extra at hay-time - a penny or tuppence an hour overtime. In harvest we used to feel wealthy. Instead of paying us overtime, they used to give us a week's extra pay. That was a fortune to us then.

I'd never been to Wadenhoe until 1908 or 1909. We had then got interested in girls and used to go to village dances (or 'Social Evenings', as they were called). One night we came to a dance at Wadenhoe and it was there I first saw my future wife Ada. She was the daughter of the Wadenhoe Church sexton, George Langley.

Agricultural work:

George Hankins looks back⁴



George Hankins (Fig.12), then the village's oldest inhabitant, died on Boxing Day 1989, aged 98. Seven years previously, he talked to Trevor Hold about his life.

We married in 1912 and I came to live at Wadenhoe as a shepherd under a farmer named Copley. By this time I was a qualified shepherd, but it was not because I was particularly smitten with the job of shepherd; it was because I wanted a house to live in. At that time, it was just as difficult for a young married couple to get a house to live in as it is now. People don't believe that but it was - because there were so many tied cottages in each village that went with the farms.

The cottage I lived in was at the top of the village on the Green (No. 9). Eventually, in about 1916, my present house (No. 24) became vacant because the man who lived there, Mr Oliver, blacksmith on the Lilford Estate, was offered a cottage at Achurch, nearer his work. I applied for it and was accepted and have lived here ever since. The farm I worked at changed hands and a young man named Smalley took it. He was a real modern, go-ahead chap. Unfortunately he got killed in the war. After that the farm again changed hands and a man named B— took it. He naturally thought he'd got me, a young man of military age, and he could do as he liked with me. Just at that period the half day came into force for farm workers, which we had been longing for, half a day a week. He threatened us and said he wouldn't let us have it. I simply told him I was going to have it. 'Ah, well', he said, 'I shall stop your wages for it.' At the end of the week he paid my wages, which was 15 bob and my house then, and I looked at it and I said, 'You've made a mistake, haven't you?' He said, 'I don't think so'. I said, 'You told me you were going to stop me for last Saturday, I had half a day off.' 'Oh', he said, 'go on' he said, 'we'll see about that.' I said, 'We shan't because you'll take a week's notice from me. I'll finish working for you. I'll go somewhere else where they don't think much of it.' I left him and I went straight away to Thrapston on the Friday night and made enquiries of a job at the Thrapston Foundry. The manager said they weren't taking on any more learners, but told me to go and have a word with the foreman of the Islip Iron Company. He said, 'I know they're desperately in need of men.' I went straight from him to the blast-furnace foreman named Hodgson, offered him my service and he said 'When can you start?' I said, 'Monday morning?' 'Right', he said, 'Six o'clock at Islip furnaces.' And so I started there. I worked there about 10 years. Later I packed up furnace work and went into the pits and I was at work there when the General Strike was, 1926. That's when I left. During that period I paid into a union which guaranteed us a certain amount of work through a strike or anything. I had built up quite a few head of poultry and a few pigs in my spare time - quite a nice little sideline. Because I'd filled that in in my application form, they simply said I wasn't unemployed and so weren't eligible for any benefit. I said, 'Well then, if that's the case, you're not eligible for any contributions.' I said, 'In future I'll pack the job up and I won't work anywhere where I'm made to pay it.' So I simply packed up work there and then... I just started on my own. I built up my poultry and my pigs and with the help of my wife - she used to do quite a bit of dressmaking and upholstery work - we just managed to make a living.

Coda

Later on, as and when he was available, George used to do odd jobs for Sid Rowell in Oundle, such as sugar-beet hoeing. During the Second World War he became Rowell's pig-man and carried on in that job for 25 years, until he retired in 1960. From then on he looked after his own pigs and poultry. He gave up the former in the mid-1960s, the latter in 1978 when he was 88. Asked if, after 70 years' residence in the village, he considered himself a Wadenhoe- or a Wigsthorpe-man, he was quite certain about that: 'a Wadenhoe man'. What was the biggest change he had noted since he first came to the village? 'So few people work in the village. At one time there were three or four people to each farm. Now only two to the whole village!' And, finally, what was his recipe for a happy old age? 'Eat slowly - don't eat too much - keep away from all alcoholic drink - and choose your partner carefully!'

Long ago before our day [Wadenhoe] had a great reputation. Its Mill did a roaring trade. 'Ah! that was a time!' the old people would say. 'We counted then! Wadenhoe was a rare place, when the Mill was agoing', every house full, 60 children in the school and we and the wives all workin'. Yes.. perhaps the pay wasn't much, but there was a lot thrown in.. lots of extras... Many of the lads 'lived in' at the farm houses and the victuals were good and so was the beer! My! What ale was brewed here then! None of your make-believe drinks. Made a fool of you, it did, if you took overmuch, and serve you right, but did you good else. And the boss, he was a gem of a man was Muster Francis Allen, at the Mill House, and mighty good to the poor - sent out wine and brandy from his own table, and soup and milk when we were sick, and helped us all round. Well! Well! the Book says 'Blessed is the man that considereth the poor.' And he was blessed an' all - three good wives and died first himself at the finish. A fine looking man too, and clever, and much respected in the county. We all loved him in Wadenhoe.

The Miller and the Mill⁵

MRS M. NEWBY

In the 19th century the mill was a flourishing concern (see Chapter 6), particularly under the direction of Francis Allen, described below. It fell into disuse in the 1880s.

*Fig. 13:
Wadenhoe Mill at work in the 1920s (Photo: Peterborough Advertiser)*



Our good times went with him. He made his money at the millering, and he spent it right and left in the place, like the gentleman he was. ... A very big turnover, I'm told.. Why that there sleepy old mill, as you see it, was a-grindin' and a-grindin' all day and all night those days!

Such waggon loads as were dragged up this Mill Lane, four horses to the waggon and a fifth - hooked on - to pull 'em along, 'cos it's that steep! It did yer heart good to see 'em and the stuff, as was sent off from here, bound for Kettering or Leicester or some town miles away. Aye, the men as went with the loads liked the job you bet!... A holiday for them... First stop, the Red Cow at Slipton, ten miles off, bait the horses there and have a drink, and so on...'

The poor master died. And those that followed him couldn't tackle the job - no money - and the old machinery no good for the new sort of flour, fine and white as the people wanted. Fine flour indeed! What has ruined folks' teeth. But that's the world all over. Yes, it's a pretty spot, I grant you, is the old Mill and the Mill House and the meadows yonder, and the red bridge - just a country peep to show yer London friends - and the bit of water handy to catch a bream or two, perhaps a tench, if you're in luck, or an eel may hap. But it's no use is the Mill to the village now. And the old people were right - there was no money, as they said, and so the Mill was silent - waiting. Just a pretty picture in its leafy setting - waiting. Would it always be so?

The years rolled on. Thirty odd years, nearly 40, and then a stir began. Reports - tales - fairy tales - nay lies were in the very air! The Mill was going to work again! No it wasn't!

Stuff and nonsense! Where's the trade? Besides, no money still - machinery old fashioned. How do you get over that, boy?

I see lights there of night, and I know what I hears!' says the 'boy' doggedly. 'I see'd the Commander [Wilfred Ward Hunt] with my own eyes this very mornin', but I'd be struck, afore I told yer what he said! So there!"

The time dragged on. The village hoped, and doubted, and hoped again. And the Mill was silent still. Then all of a sudden - it seemed at the last quite sudden - for months are sudden to people who can look back 40 years - the great day dawned. The Mill was to start that morning, September 19th, 1927.

There was to be a 'do'. We were all bidden, from the parson to the baby in arms, and we all went. And the Miller - the Commander - stood on the steps by the Mill door and welcomed us, for all the world as if he were in the 'Fox', a-receiving guests at a dance! And we trooped in, and we looked round the old place, and saw the big wheels and the great flat stones - and we waited.

Then the thing happened.

For Peter, the miller's son, aged ten [now Chairman of the History Group], set the Mill going, and worked it like a man! And we all cheered Peter; and we cheered everything and everybody till we were 'fair' hoarse. Then refreshments were handed round, and we made speeches, and drank the Commander's health, and success to the Mill and prosperity to Wadenhoe. We did not forget to toast the good old days neither - we made a regular 'do' of it.

It was like old times, some of us said - the highest praise! The dear good old days!

‘But they’ll come back for Wadenhoe, mark you. For is not the Mill working just as it used? A-groanin’ and a’grumblin’ and a’grindin’ night and day? And don’t the motor lorries and the cars fly about the country, morning, noon and night, with the sacks? And is not the Miller, our Commander, a good true friend to us all? A regular sailor he is, turning his hand to anything and everything and a-settlin’ down in this little place, he that’s been to foreign parts and seen half the world and talked with kings and queens - he to be messing about with flour and meal!... But they’re the right sort after all. For does not his very name stand for something in Wadenhoe? Don’t we know he will see this job through and make things hum in the village - if flesh and blood can do it.’

‘That part of Northamptonshire lying between Oundle and Peterborough can be bleak and cold at the best of times in winter, for much of it is exposed and to the east, particularly and there is very little frost protection from the wind and storm. Not a very suitable place for Jerseys some would say, and yet it is here that Miss Mary Ward Hunt has developed a herd under a system which may well be unique. It would certainly be unusual practice if applied to any dairy herd.

Hardy Jerseys⁶

See Chapter 7 Part I for the history of MARY WARD HUNT’s Jersey herd. The following account from the Journal of the English Jersey Cattle Society is a testimonial to her originality.



Fig. 14:
‘Wadenhoe Primrose’

Conditions were atrocious on a day in January when a visit was paid, and yet the whole herd, including calves not yet four months old, were out grazing. All the stock except the milkers were lying out at nights and looking fit and well.

The land is rough parkland, heavy and wet, and until four years or so ago lying derelict. Excepting for a few trees and the natural contours of the land, there was little shelter. The outliers get very little supplementary feeding, but from the beginning of December they are

fed a little hay or wheat straw, with silage twice weekly in addition to grazing.

The success of the system is very largely due to the management of the stock, using them to hard conditions from an early age.

Calves are housed in outdoor pens from four days old, the accommodation consisting of a covered pen and small open yard for each calf. They each receive 4+ pints of milk and 1+ pints of water as a maximum. Hay is supplied from a week old. No calf nuts are fed, but the calves get rolled oats containing a balanced mineral mixture until they are twelve weeks old when they are weaned and turned out to grass.

The grazing for the cattle is kept short by ponies which are allowed on first so as to eat down the lush grazing in summer. The cattle are allowed pasture ad lib in winter but not in summer.

Miss Ward Hunt claims that the mixed grazing prevents any of the stock having intestinal or husk worms, and certainly the condition of the animals shows that they thrive under the system.

All the horned stock are inoculated against contagious abortion, and, unusually, against anthrax which is almost endemic owing it is supposed to the amount of tannery effluent which gets into the streams. There has been no case of Johne's disease in the herd.

The dairy cows go out in all weathers in winter from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., but are housed at night. Some supplementary feeding such as hay or silage (20-30 lb daily of pea haulm silage) and some 15-20 lb mangolds daily is given, and in winter 3 lb per gallon of a proprietary cake is fed. Milking is done by hand and the produce (sold in bulk) finds a ready market because of its very high butterfat content. Individual tests of up to 8.50% butterfat have been taken, and one home-bred heifer with first calf has given 8,323+ lb milk, 7.53% butterfat in 274 days, and is still milking. Another has already given in 177 days 5,077 lb milk, 5.70% butterfat.

It should be mentioned that heifers are never 'steamed up' before calving, coming straight in from the fields. A heifer, still lying out, but due to calve on the day of our visit, had made a grand udder and was in very fit condition. It had of course been treated exactly as all the others and had not been steamed up. Some of the older cows do get about 2 lb concentrates daily in winter before calving.'

Farming in the 20th Century

STEPHEN HALL

Prior to the First World War there were two large tenanted units of over 150 acres and a number of smallholdings. Broadly speaking the two large units were traditional in their farming enterprises, with livestock and arable crops. The smallholders practised a degree of specialisation in order to optimise the acreage and manpower available, with a four- to five-year rotation on the predominantly clay soils. This was varied to integrate with the livestock carried, root crops being grown to provide winter feed for sheep and some oats to support the large

number of working horses which were wintered in the farm buildings. A typical rotation consisted of wheat, barley, beans, a root crop and a fallow year in which the weed seeds were allowed to germinate before being ploughed in. The pasture was all permanent, being grazed by dairy cattle, beef cattle and sheep. The water meadows were the most productive, producing over a ton an acre of hay after being flooded naturally during the winter by a less flood-controlled river Nene. As industry expanded in the areas around Thrapston, Twywell and later Corby, it became increasingly difficult to attract or even retain farm labour because of the meagre agricultural wages, as graphically described by George Hankins above. The only real draw to a career in farming was the possibility of a tied farm cottage.

Mill Farm has had the greatest continuity in tenancy, the Childs family taking over the farm in the late 1880s when the Allens (*see Chapter 6*) gave up the tenancy of the farm and mill to George Childs. Although the Childs' main home continued to be in Twywell, members of the family lived in the Mill Farm Stables, the most notable resident being Aunt May, who was assistant teacher at the School until 1922 and married William Tomlin, publican of one of the then public houses in Aldwinckle. The Childs family endured the First World War and the depression of the 1920s and 1930s better than most by relying upon the unpaid labour of their three sons Reg, Frank and Len. Under the Childs the Mill Farm has always been a beef and dairy enterprise using a traditional extensive farming system. The farm buildings stand mainly unchanged in the 1990s, a fascinating insight into farming life during the last hundred years (*see Chapter 3*).

The second large unit in the village has been mainly arable, centred on Manor Farm, tenanted during the present century by the Swiffin, Gifford, Morris, Kenyon and Knight families. Billy Swiffin farmed between 1914 and 1939 and was succeeded by Gifford, who strived to make a living during the Second World War. One of his contributions to the war effort was to dig up a 4 lb flash bomb which had been dropped by an RAF bomber short of the practice bombing range in Bearshanks Wood. Having dug up the small incendiary device he placed it in a small barn next to the livestock hovels near the reservoir, and claimed damages from the Ministry for the loss of a high-quality crop of hay and a quantity of corn. The local constabulary were suspicious but were unable to disprove the claim and it is rumoured that some of the 'spoilt' corn was rescued from the fire and fed to poultry in the village!

Aldwinckle Lodge Farm formed the other large unit in Wadenhoe, which also included land in the Aldwinckle parish. This was farmed by the Bullimore family for two generations until it was bought by the Pollocks in 1988. During a storm in the 1920s five farm labourers on their way back from the public house in Aldwinckle were killed by lightning at the gate to this farm as they sheltered under a large tree in their pony and trap.

Since the end of the war the farming systems in the parish have been heavily skewed by subsidies granted by the Common Agricultural Policy. Much of the flatter permanent pasture has been

ploughed up and incorporated into a more intensive arable rotation. It is entirely due to Reg Childs' traditional farming methods that the parish retains two fine examples of pre-enclosure ridge and furrow fields (*see Chapter 2*). These are now part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and can be enjoyed by people walking the Lyveden Way footpath.

The review of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the year 2000 will change the emphasis of the support and grants given to farmers. If the public support for initiatives such as the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Nene Valley Project continue to be matched by financial resources, the long-term impact on Wadenhoe of the CAP review may be softened by careful management of resources.

References

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