

May 2024 - Meeting Report

Hi All,

Our May meeting, which was the first after our Annual General Meeting (AGM), continued our excellent beginning for 2024.

We had an attendance of forty-five members, including twelve renewals, and twelve visitors, so a total of fifty-seven.

We had an brilliant presentation from Paul Mortimer which was entitled 'Sutton Hoo and King Rædwald.'

On the remaining pages of the Newsletter, we have:

On page two is the 'Coming Events' section.

Our next Meeting is on Monday 10th June 2024 and is the 'History of Death Masks and Phrenology' by Louise Robinson. I am not sure where Pat finds these speakers from, but I am sure that it will be interesting and thought provoking.

Also, on page two we have a request for information concerning what was the HDA Club on Batchley and forthcoming activities at Forge Mill Needle Museum.

Pages three and four is a report on the fascinating presentation from Paul Mortimer 'Sutton Hoo and King Rædwald'.

On pages five to eight there is the beginning of a new series of articles which have produced in the absence of any outside input. This is entitled 'Redditch - Our Farming Heritage' and will run over three or four issues. It is a combination of an article which I produced for the 'Feckenham Forester' magazine Issue No:7 (2020) and an exhibition which I gave at Forge Mill Needle Museum Gallery in 2012.

Next Meeting...

Our next Meeting is on Monday 10th June 2024 and is the 'History of Death Masks and Phrenology' by Louise Robinson. There is more on this presentation on Page 2.

The meeting will be, as always at the Oasis Christian Centre starting at 2.00 pm.

Anthony Green, Society Secretary

E-mail: tony.rhs@btinternet.com Tel: 01527 61434

Coming up.....

Next Meeting Monday 10th June 2024

History of Death Masks and Phrenology.

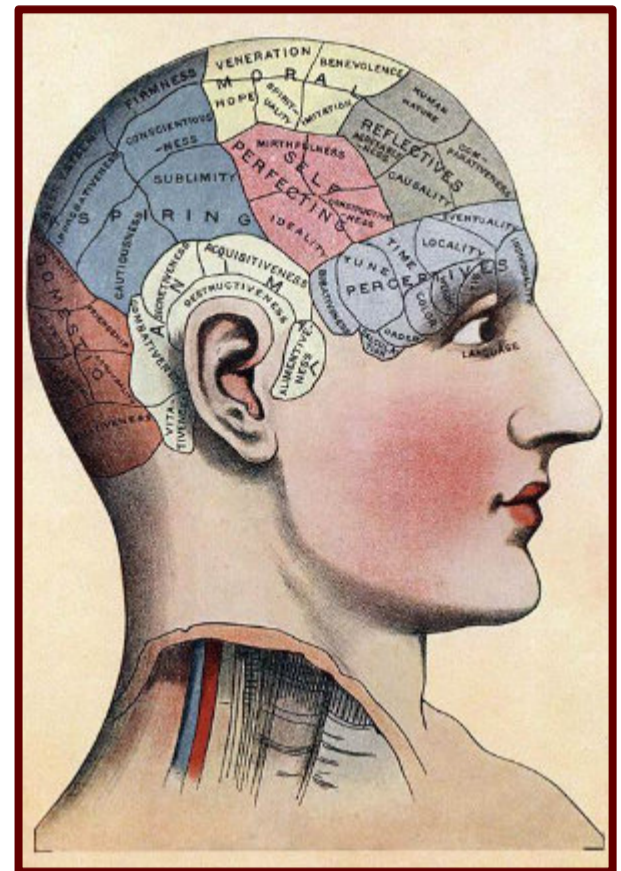
Presentation by Louise Robinson

Louise Robinson, a BSc in Anatomical Studies from the University of Birmingham, will be delivering a captivating talk on the history of Phrenology and the George Marshall Medical Museum's collection of death masks.

Death masks have a rich history stretching back millennia, often created as artworks for elite members of society. These masks immortalised the faces of icons, criminals, and even babies.

Interestingly, this practice coincided with a surge of interest in the pseudoscience of phrenology, which inferred personality traits from skull features.

If you're intrigued by these historical artefacts, Louise's talk will be a fascinating exploration!



Request for Information

I am looking for some help and have drawn a blank everywhere else. I am part of Redditch borough football club based at the old Mettis HDA on Cherry Tree Walk. We have been trying to find any history of the club and hear different stories from different people with regards to what may be below the ground, from streams to rivers to hidden wells.

I wondered if you as a society had old maps or images or documents from when Mettis built the social club and changing rooms over the years. Steve.
stevecourt84@googlemail.com

Current Forge Mill Needle Museum Exhibition



Running until Sunday 2nd June 2024 is **MAKING CONNECTIONS**: An exhibition by the Midlands Textile Forum

The MTF are a group of artists who are drawn together by their passion and enthusiasm for textile art. They work in a diverse range of media from printing, fabric manipulation, lacemaking, quilting and machine embroidery.

The inspiration for this exhibition is the connections we make with others, the natural environment, the community and beyond.

More Details, including 'Meet the Artists' at <https://www.forgemill.org.uk/web/exhibitions/>

Sutton Hoo and King Rædwald.

Presentation by Paul Mortimer

Paul began the meeting by striding down the centre aisle in full costume (image top right), and announcing, in old English, with a strident voice that he was King Rædwald.

His costume was a meticulously made facsimile reconstructed from the fragments found at the dig, and throughout the meeting Paul discussed these and the craftsmen who had constructed the modern facsimiles.

Paul very quickly removed 'nearly' all his costume due to weight and heat before continuing with the presentation.

Paul Mortimer has had a lifelong interest in the early medieval period, particularly in Northern Europe, and he began his presentation with an overview of the period.

The 'invasion' by the 'Anglo-Saxons' occurred in the 6th Century, although they would not have recognised the name, and the numbers who arrived in England is still a question for debate.

The Anglo-Saxons settled in the eastern parts of Britain, in what is today, Kent, Sussex, Essex, and East Anglia. The majority of the native, British, population either remained where they were, or migrated west, to what became Wales and Cornwall.

Many Anglo-Saxons came peacefully, to find land to farm. Their homelands in Scandinavia often flooded so it was tough to grow enough food back there and whole families set sail across the sea in small boats to live in Britain.

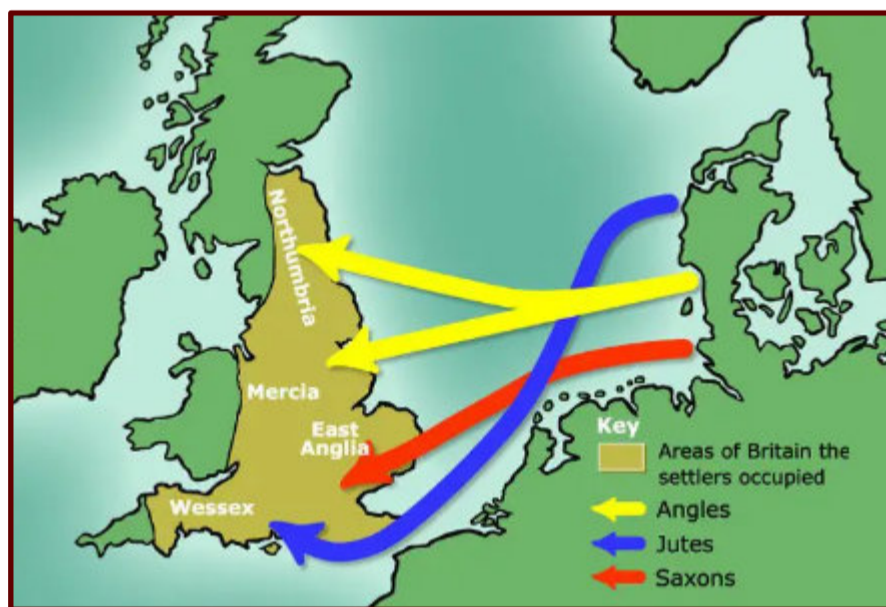
They brought tools, weapons and farm animals with them and built new villages.

Sutton Hoo is the site of two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries dating from the 6th to 7th centuries near Woodbridge, Suffolk and Paul has been trying to understand the Sutton Hoo, Mound 1 burial and its implications for several decades.

He has closely studied the reports from the famous dig in 1939 and the ship-burial discovered under Mound 1 contained one of the most magnificent archaeological finds in England for its size and completeness.

Paul was a consultant and prop supplier for the film 'The Dig' a Netflix film which re-imagined the events of the 1939 excavation of Sutton Hoo.

Top: Paul Mortimer in his Rædwald costume.
Middle: The Anglo-Saxon Invasion.
Bottom: Ship burial photograph (1939) at Sutton Hoo



Sutton Hoo and King Raedwald cont..

During the time that Paul has been interested in King Raedwald and Sutton Hoo, he has had many of the items reconstructed by specialist craftsmen and this process has led to several new insights into how the objects may have been used and how they could work together.

There was significant use of agate at this time and the reconstructions were of amazing quality and it was amazing to be able to pick them up and examine them.

Paul passed around many of the objects, and everyone had a chance to look at the helmet and decorated buckles etc.

However, the sword was in a sheath and he insisted that it was too sharp to be passed around. I'm not sure what our position would be with insurance if someone cut themselves!

The construction of the sword was quite interesting as Anglo-Saxon swords were crafted using a technique called pattern-welding.

The sword was constructed with a formation of Iron rods twisted together and then forged to form the sword's core the sharp cutting edges were then attached to the core.

The resulting blades displayed intricate patterns resembling herringbone or snakeskin markings.

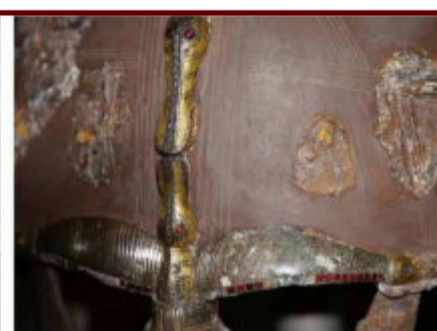
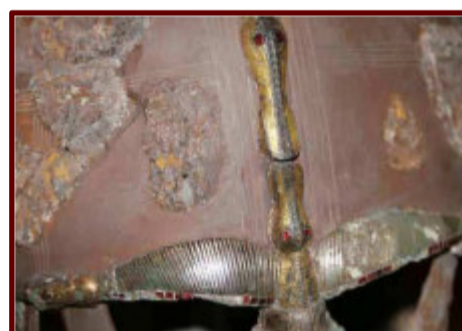
These swords typically had two sharp blades—one on each side—and featured a pommel near the grip to help balance the weight for easier use. Guards below the grip protected the hand during combat.

The Sutton Hoo ship-burial yielded swords with pattern-welded blades, displaying their craftsmanship.

Paul gave a much more detailed explanation of the artefacts than I can give here and has written extensively on the period. His most recent book was a collaborative effort specifically on swords from England during the fifth to seventh centuries.

Paul was an excellent speaker, and we were lucky that, due to our speaker organiser Pat, he was willing to come up from Essex to give this presentation.

This was another enjoyable presentation, which I cannot in words do justice to it in this summary. The audience gave a suitable appreciation, and he was surrounded by questions at the end.



Top: Aerial view of the site.
Above Middle Left: The helmet
Above Middle Right: Whetstone Sceptre
Below Middle: Helmet eyebrows
Bottom: Sutton Hoo Warriors

Redditch - Our Farming Heritage

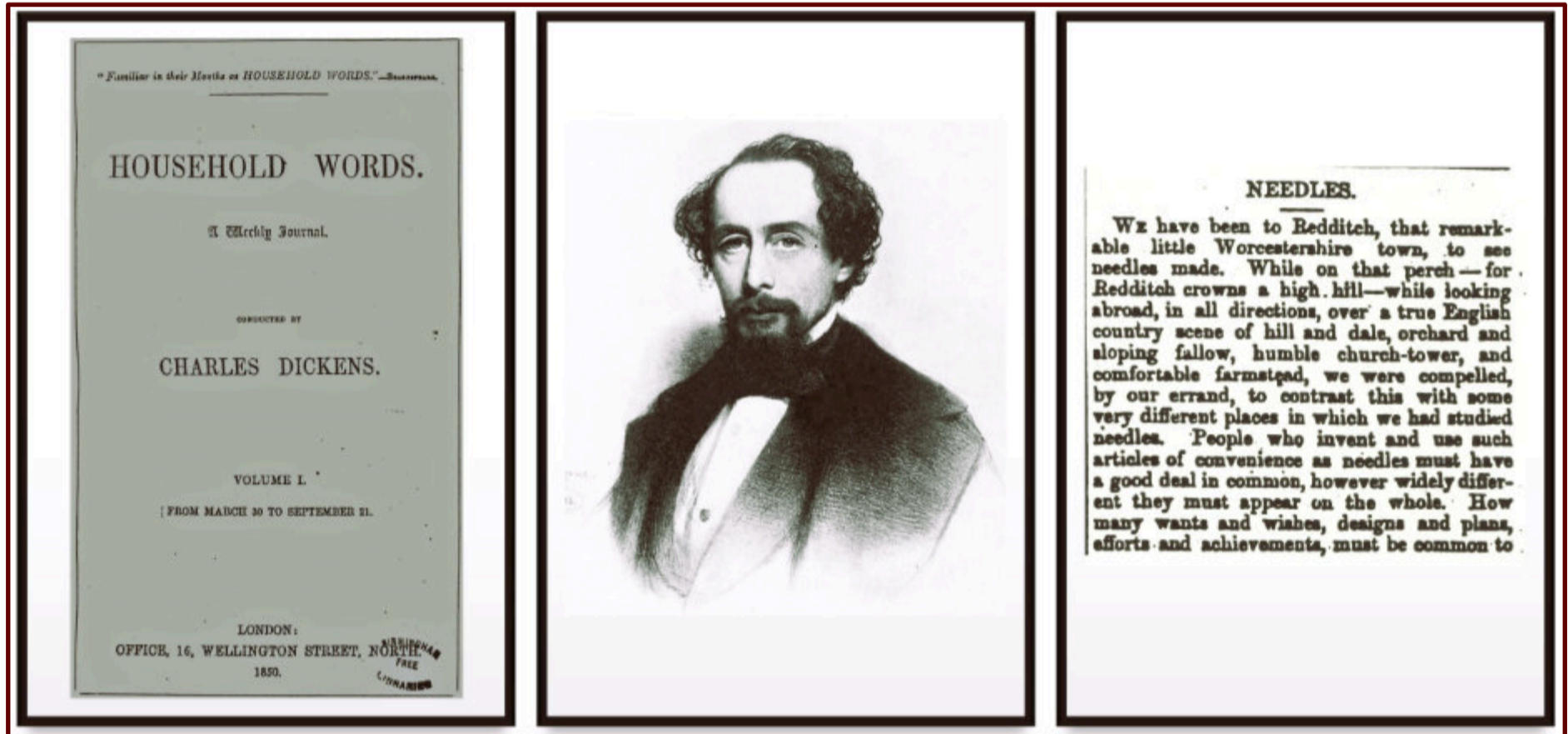
by Anthony Green

Part 1 - the early landscape

Redditch, while not unique, is unusual in being throughout most of its history a small compact industrial town, with a range of trades, surrounded by traditional English countryside.

Its main development as an industrial centre began in the 18th Century with needle manufacture and expanded rapidly over the following centuries to include fishhooks, springs, cycles and motorcycles, batteries and other trades.

However, it was an industrial town created within the attractive landscape in North-East Worcestershire.



When, in 1850, Charles Dickens, visited the town to see needle manufacture, he introduced the article stated in his journal Household Matters with the statement that:

'We have been to Redditch, that remarkable little Worcestershire town, to see needles made. While on that perch - Redditch crowns a high hill—while looking abroad, in all directions, over a true English country scene of hill and dale, orchard and sloping fallow, humble church tower, and comfortable farmstead, we were compelled, by our errand, to contrast this with some very different places in which we had studied needles.'

The town was very proud of this heritage and in the introduction to the town guide of 1928/9, Redditch was described thus.

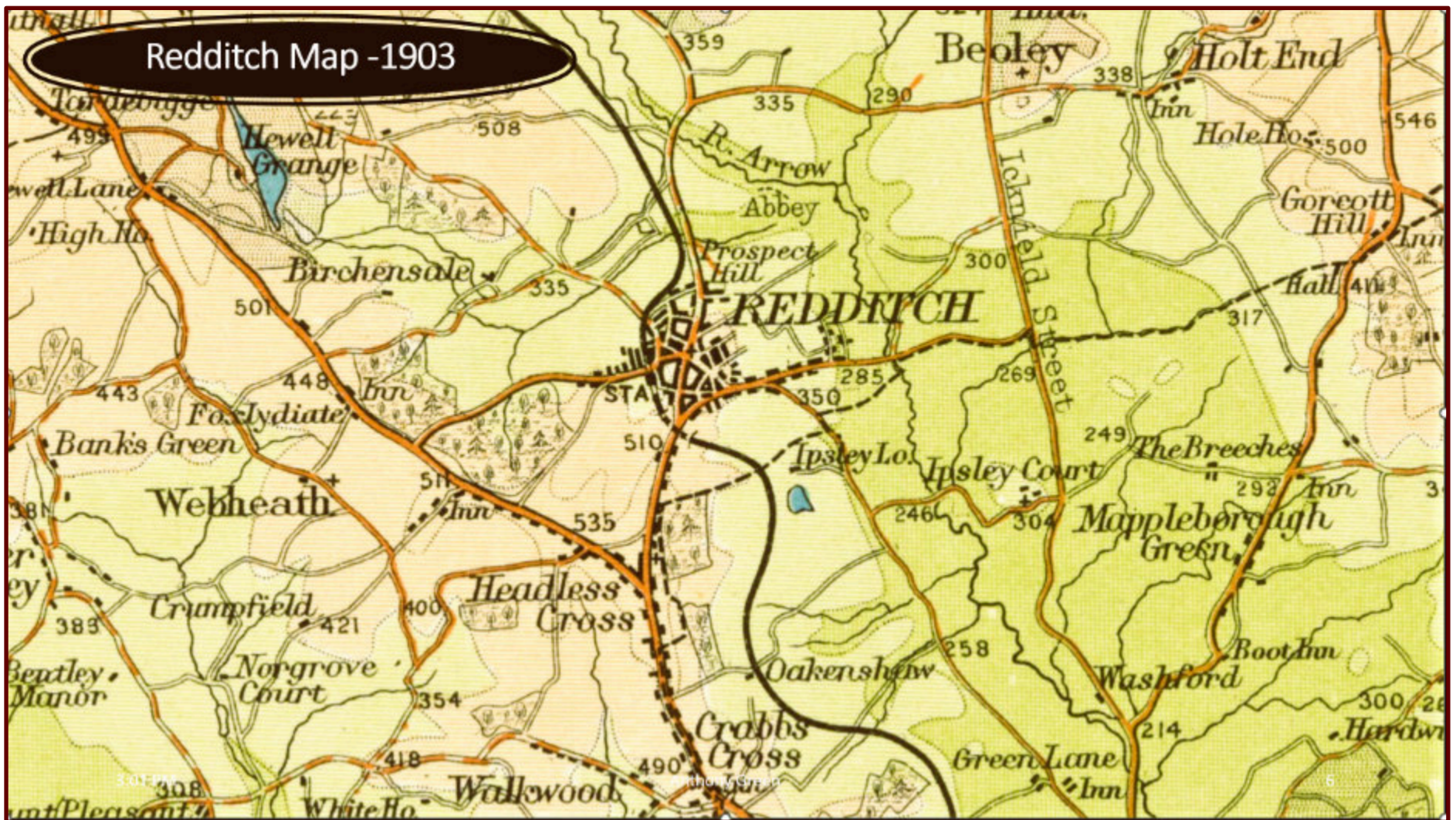
'Standing upon the border line of well-wooded Worcestershire and Warwickshire, the scenery of the district, is typically that of the Midlands—peaceful and pastoral, gently undulating for the most part, with narrow leafy lanes, fruitful fields and orchards and quiet farmsteads, presenting a marked contrast to the wild and rugged grandeur of the scenery in some parts of Wales and the northern counties.

Its charm lies, not in its impressive grandeur, but in its soothing restfulness, and the constant change of view it offers to the one who walks or cycles along its winding; and sweet-scented lanes.'



Above: Foxlydiate image from Redditch town guide

Farming Heritage 1 Continued 2



This 'idyllic' rural scene evoked by these descriptions, although a bit overdone, was created by centuries of change in the local area since the medieval period.

The 1903 map, above, shows that Redditch, at this time, although centrally industrial, was very much centred in the countryside and it was only a short walk to be surrounded by an agricultural landscape.

So, how was this local landscape created?

Although there is evidence that there was some activity before the Anglo-Saxon period, the landscape was essentially developed from this period onwards and many of the historic features date from the Medieval age.

So, it is important, when looking around the vast new developments in the town, to look a bit deeper into the landscape as it reveals examples of this earlier age.



Probably the first serious 'modern' farming began with Bordesley Abbey which was founded in 1138 on land given by Waleran de Beaumont (1104 - 1166). This was probably a daughter abbey of the first Cistercian abbey in England; Waverley Abbey, Surrey.

This covered a much larger area of Redditch than it appears from the current abbey precinct.

The wealth of the Cistercian Monks came from the extensive sheep herds which they owned. They raised sheep within the Abbey precinct but, more extensively, in their 'granges' using tenant farmers.

Sheep were important, not because of their meat, but because of the wool that produced, which produced the best clothing available in Medieval times.

Farming Heritage 1 Continued 3

Over their granges their herds totalled over 3,000 sheep which made the Abbey one of the wealthiest in the country.

However, although the main income for the monastery came from the sheep herds, they did support local farming in the area using Medieval techniques, and, surprisingly, evidence of this can still be found in Redditch, which can be attributed both to the monks and local farmers.



An example of medieval farming is 'ridge and furrow' ploughing which is the term used for the pattern of ridges and troughs created by a system of ploughing used in Europe during the Middle Ages.

This is typical of the open field system which would have been found in this area.

In earlier years this evidence of this historic method of ploughing would have been found throughout the area.

However, despite the steady housing developments which have taken place over the last 50 years it is still possible to find evidence of this historic method of farming.

An example can be found at Bordesley Abbey, an area which has been undisturbed since the dissolution of the Abbey.

The photograph, which I took, above right, taken from the 'viewpoint' in the abbey precinct, illustrates the effect of ridge and furrow ploughing which can be seen on the landscape today.

It is not too obvious from my photograph, but if you visit the site, it is much more evident.



At the time of the monks there would not have been many field boundaries on the Abbey precinct as they grazed sheep.. Land enclosure began in Tudor times and, in this area, by the 18th Century virtually all land was enclosed.. Many hedges actually started their lives off as banks or as fences of cut sticks (some of which rooted).

Farming Heritage 1 Continued 4

A common fertilization technique for farming in the Middle Ages was a system called marling, where farmers spread clay containing lime carbonate onto their soil.

This process restored the nutrients needed to grow crops.

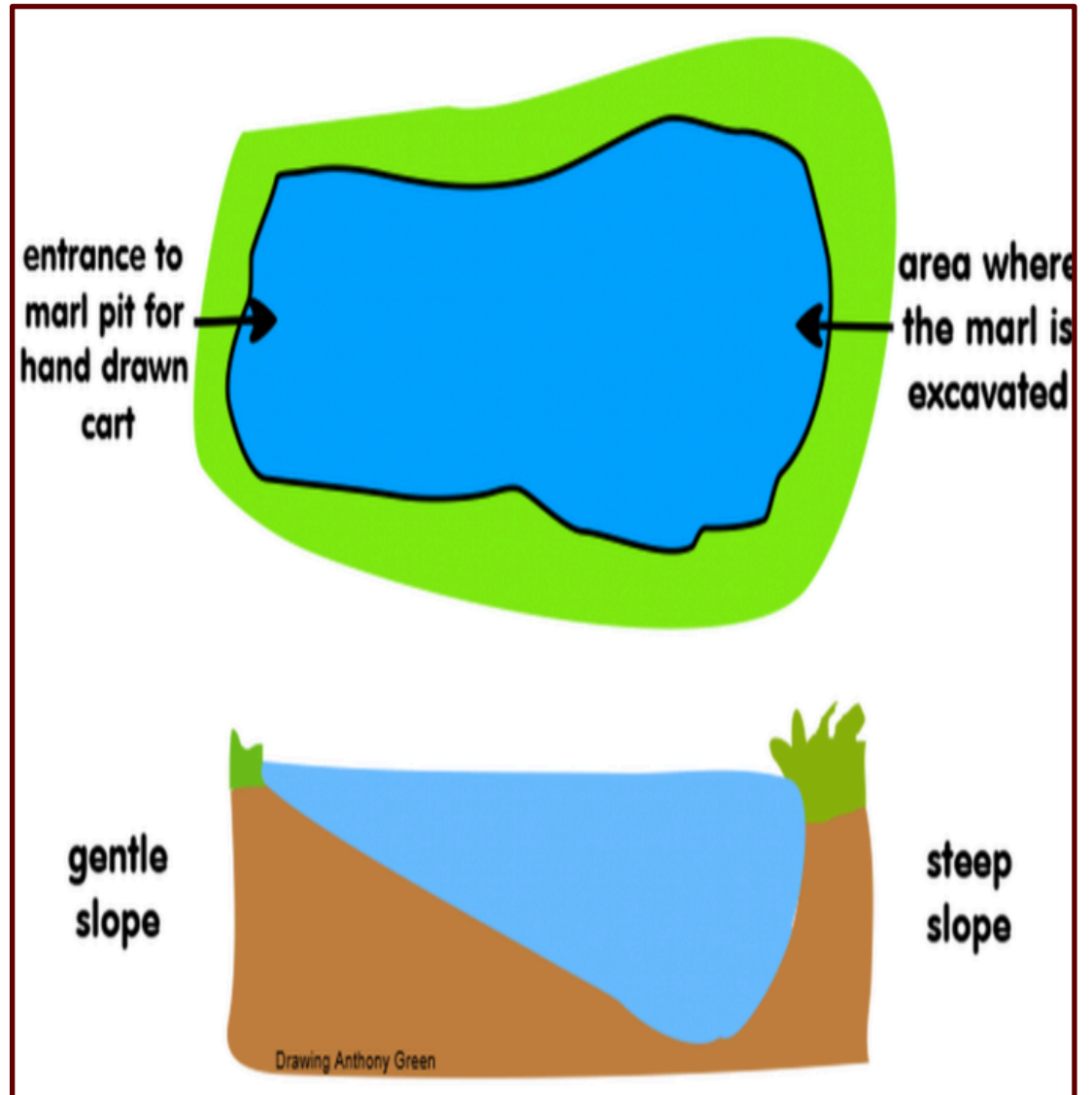
Of course, farmers also used manure as fertilizer, which they obtained from the livestock they raised.

Marl pits have been a feature of our area for well over 800 years and are particularly found today in the Church Hill area.

The "glacial drift" left behind by the Ice Age of ten thousand years ago created swathes of sand and marl along the contour lines of the slopes left by the retreating ice.

The marl was common at depths of 1 to 2 metres and had to be dug out of the ground - creating marl pits.

The marl pits are easily distinguishable by the square edged gentle slope at one end of the pit and a steep rounded slope at the other.



The shape was the result of a few hundredweights of marl being dug out and loaded into carts which were then hauled up the sloping end of the pit.

Over twelve months the pit would partly fill with water, so another pit was dug a few yards away which led to the area being dotted with marl pits.

The practice of "marling" may have ceased but the ponds it left behind remained an asset for wildlife in the area.

The ponds provide a source of drinking water for wildfowl and other birds and provide a habitat to water-based amphibians such as toads, frogs and newts so enhancing our urban environment for residents.

In Part 2, I will be looking at how Redditch evolved its farming history in the 20th Century.