

Community **A**rchaeology on the **M**endip **P**lateau

Hollowmarsh: a Medieval, Communal Meadowland in North-east Somerset



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Abstract

Hollowmarsh provides a fossilised, medieval landscape of former meadowland, which was farmed in common by its seven surrounding manors, with additional detached manors having allocations. The strip field system of land allocation is preserved in the outline of today's field patterns.

Community Archaeology on the Mendip Plateau (CAMP) has conducted a multi-disciplinary study of this historic landscape. This report constitutes a brief record of that research. A full report entitled

Hollowmarsh: A Fossilised, Medieval Landscape in North-east Somerset

is to be published by CAMP and deposited at the Somerset Heritage Centre in December 2010.

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Geography and Topography

Hollowmarsh, centred at ST 613563, lies 6 km west-north-west of Midsomer Norton and 16 km south of Bristol in the county of Somerset

Hollowmarsh occupies a shallow depression of approximately 1.75 square kilometres being surrounded by the villages of Litton and Hinton Blewett (west), Cameley (north), Hallatrow and High Littleton (north-east), Farrington Gurney and Ston Easton (east) and Chewton Mendip to the south-west (fig 1).

It lies 90m to 100m above sea level, with surrounding hills reaching up to 160metres in height.

Hollowmarsh is criss-crossed by numerous man-made drainage ditches flowing into a stream that drains to the north-east into the Cam brook at Temple Bridge ST 62555720.

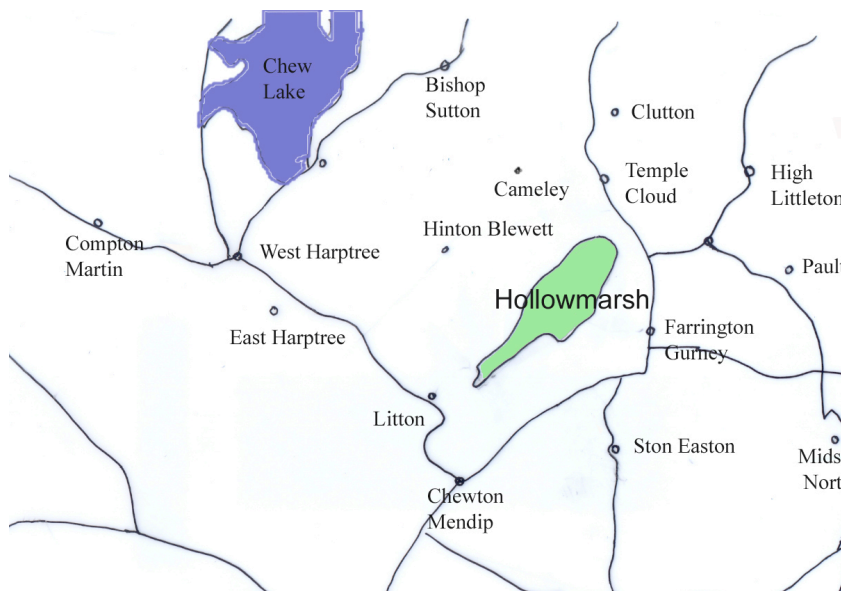


Fig. 1 Location of Hollowmarsh and surrounding villages (map by P. Osborne 2009)

Geology and Soils

The superficial deposits of the area are of a river terrace formation, possibly deposited by the river Chew when it occupied an earlier river course. The deposits are represented by a thick layer of alluvium. The alluvial deposits rest on the Mercian Mudstones which outcrop around the fringes of Hollowmarsh with a covering of the Jurassic Lower Lias on the surrounding hills of Hinton Blewett and Chewton Mendip (Green and Welch 1965).

The soils are of three series - Max, Compton and Spetchley. The Max and Compton series form on the gravels and the clay alluvium of the Hollowmarsh depression. The soils, once drainage water is removed, support pasture and a significant area of arable land. Percolation through these soils is relatively slow and conditions, in places, may be damp. The surrounding Mercian Mudstone supports the Spetchley series, requiring drainage, but again supporting pasture and Chewton Wood (Findlay 1965).

Land Use

Today the land is a mix of permanent pasture with some arable and plantation. There is a nature reserve run by the Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Fields and settlement

Hollowmarsh has a regular pattern of straight, parallel field boundaries orientated NW/SE. No metalled roads cross it and all the settlements lie outside the Marsh. There are numerous footpaths giving access from all directions.

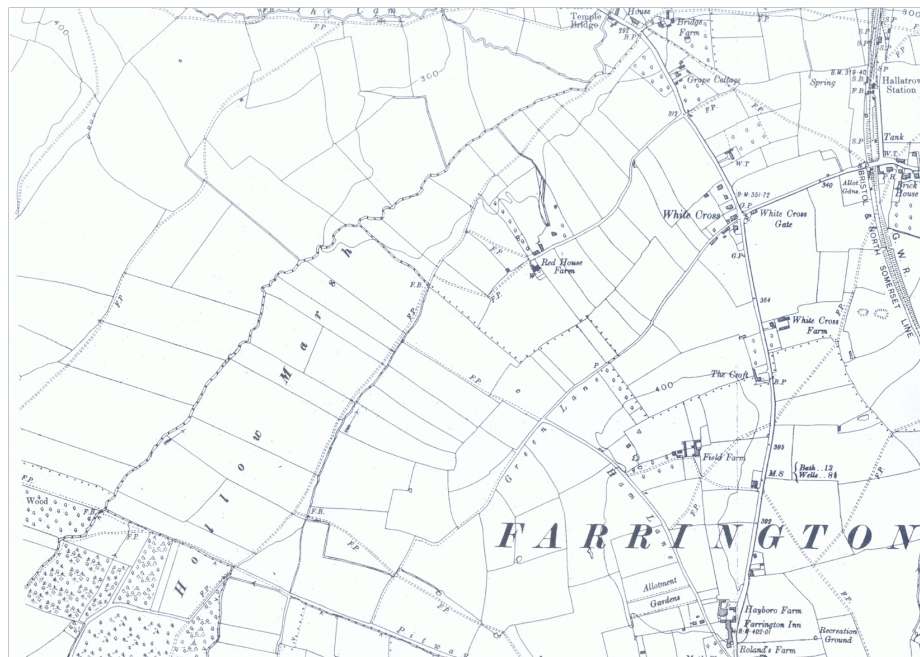


Fig. 2 Northerly section of Hollowmarsh showing field boundaries reflecting earlier pattern of strip allocation. (1904 OS map)

Brief Historical Context

Hollowmarsh sits within an area belonging to the Royal Estate of Chewton in Saxon times (Costen pers com 2009). In the parish of Chewton Mendip there is evidence for settlement dating back to the Bronze Age and field names 'Worbury' and 'Blacklands' on Chewton Plain reflect the presence of Iron Age-Romano British occupation to the immediate south-east of the Marsh (Appendix 1). The low-lying meadowlands of the Marsh would have been a source of hay and pasture for the animals belonging to these settlements and vital to their pastoral economies.

In later medieval times seven manorial boundaries were 'fixed' to converge on the Marsh in a seemingly fair and proportionate way to the size of the individual manors (see fig.3). References to 'Chewton's' Hollowmarsh in the records of these other manors suggests that Chewton had overall control of its management. There were also parcels of land taken out of Chewton's allocation and apportioned to the detached manors of Paulton, Welton and Emborough, also in Somerset. These detached portions are shown as persisting in land ownership and field names on the Tithe maps of the 19th century.

All the manors would have had to adhere to a strict regime regarding cultivation of Hollowmarsh. As with other medieval meadows farmed in common, grass would be allowed to grow from early summer, cut and removed to settlement in around July, after which tenants could bring their animals onto the grasslands to graze. Gates at routeway entrances onto the Marsh would have contained the animals. This provided pasturing whilst keeping the animals separate from arable crops in the settlements. In the autumn and when the land became water-logged the animals were removed and pastured on the stubble on the arable to aid manuring. The hay gathered in the summer then provided the fodder for the winter months (Brian 1993, Williamson 2003)

Due to the survival of post-medieval Estate Records for the manor of Chewton it has been possible to place the exact position of field allocation in the Marsh to the various tenements who had entitlement in the manor of Chewton during medieval times.

Where other manors' records survive they show a similar allocation system at work.

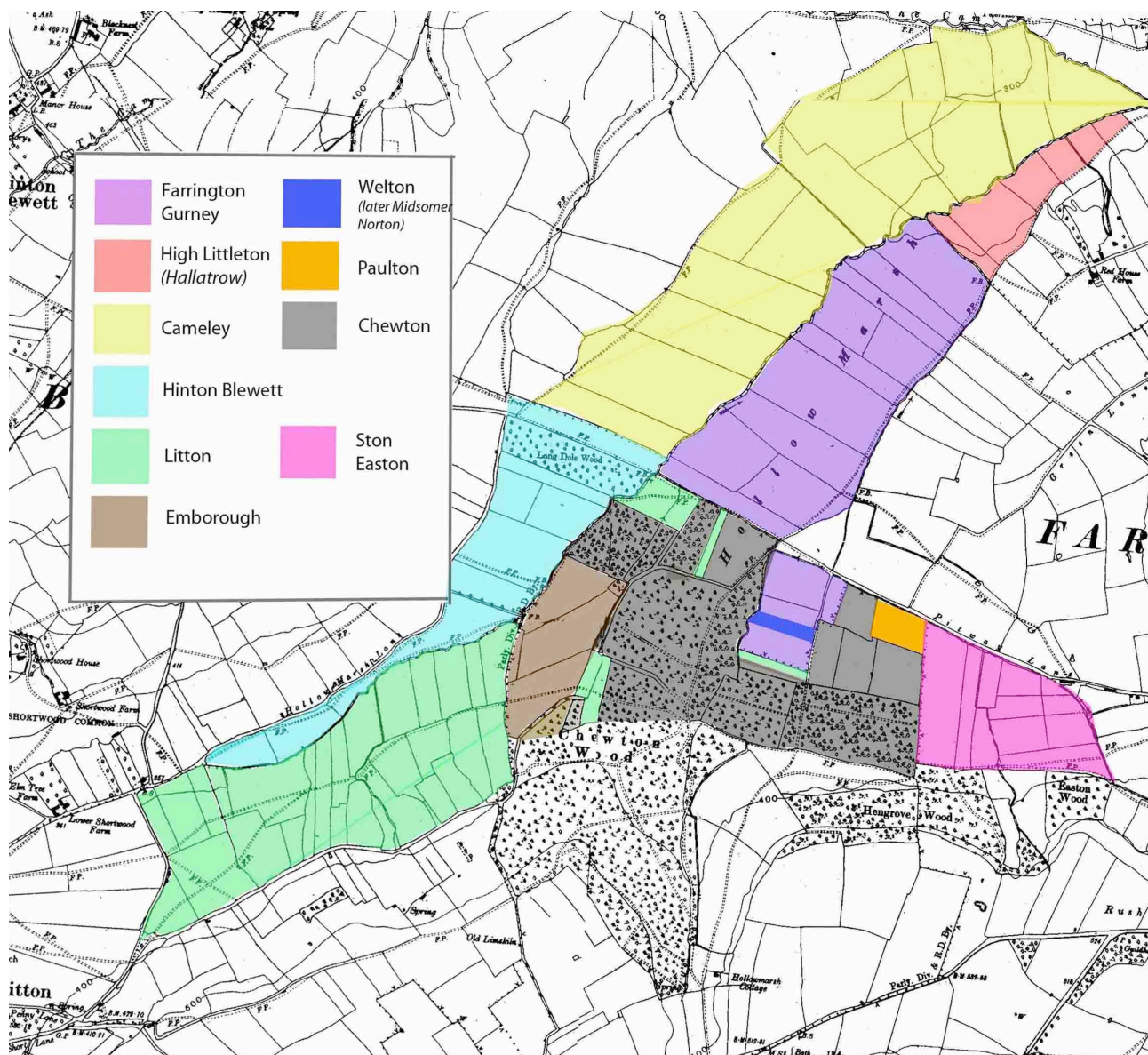


Fig.3

Hollowmarsh and the 10 manors' allocations of land.

(1904 OS map, graphics P.Osborne)

Documentary and Cartographical Sources (see Bibliography for full references)

Evidence has been drawn from a wide variety of sources including:

Domesday Book, Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem (various), Estate maps, surveys and papers, Tithe maps and Apportionments and the Ordnance Survey 6" map 1904 edition.

Archaeological Evidence

It has been very difficult to ascertain the precise perimeter boundary of Hollowmarsh. On maps (see fig.2) and in published documents (www.bathnes.gov.uk) it has been variously identified through geology, soil type and topography. CAMP has attempted to use 'Hollowmarsh' field names as its main means although none of these categories coincides precisely.

Where as much of the outer boundary, based on field names, is physically unremarkable, two sections are worthy of note. These both concern the presence of Park names immediately outside the Marsh boundary. To the north-west was a possible Deer Park of Cameley and to the south-east a Deer Park of Chewton Manor.

In a similar way to medieval common arable farming, Hollowmarsh was allocated in strips, each of approximately one acre. The evidence survives in the shape of rectangular fields with bank, ditch and hedge boundaries. These would have had many sub-divisions. Despite an extensive search, no bound stones were found and therefore it is impossible to ascertain the precise nature of these sub-boundaries. Some more substantial boundaries reflect blocks of land held in severalty, either by the Lords of the Manor or by freeholders living within the various manors.

Wherever possible, natural watercourses were used to fix manorial boundaries, with artificial drainage ditches being used elsewhere.

Many footpaths criss-crossing the Marsh, and surviving today, would have afforded access from the surrounding manors. In general these were well-bounded to prevent animals straying en-route to and from the Marsh. Tratman (1962) believed one of these routeways to have been the course of a Roman road from Sea Mills to the Fosse Way which crossed the Marsh between Hinton Blewett and Farrington Gurney. CAMP has examined the evidence. The projected course does form the boundary between Hinton Blewett and Cameley and Farrington Gurney and Chewton Mendip, which may be significant. The approach from Hinton Blewett does indeed resemble a Roman road profile with raised, stony routeway flanked by ditches as stated by Tratman. However there is no apparent evidence for a continuation in the Marsh section and the easterly section may survive only as the later course of Pitway Lane.

Documentary and Cartographical Evidence *(a summarised version)*

This takes several forms.

CAMP has studied and analysed all the relevant Tithe maps with their corresponding Apportionments. Tithe maps reflect the strip-like nature of field allocation and names such as Long Dole and Mead persist to reflect medieval land allocation and useage. Names such as Lord's Mead show retention of some land for the Lord of the Manor. Of exceptional interest is the Salt Marsh in Chewton Manor, forming a continuation of an elongated area of Withey beds within the Marsh boundary but abutting the Deer Park.

Earlier Estate maps, surveys and papers provide valuable information for regressive study of land use and field name change. They also help confirm Hollowmarsh names and boundaries as originating in medieval times.

An analysis of the acreages of meadowlands in each of the seven surrounding manors in the Domesday Book shows a direct correlation with those of the Tithe maps and Apportionments (see Appendix 2). This suggests that the internal manorial boundaries were fixed in the landscape at sometime prior to 1086.

Inquisitions Post Mortem and Close Rolls have helped establish the passing of land ownership into the Chewton Estate in later medieval times, in particular through the marriage to John de Beauchamp of Cecily, daughter of William de Vivonia alias Fortibus Lord Chewton (born c1219). This accounts for Welton Manor's presence in the Marsh.

A detailed description of each manor's field allocation with field names, acreage and land use will appear in the forthcoming (2010) Full Report **Hollowmarsh: A Fossilised Medieval Landscape in North-east Somerset**. This will also include the historical background to the detached manors' presence on the Marsh.

Brief Discussion

If we consider the Marsh as a highly organised communal resource in medieval times the question must arise as to when both the peripheral and internal boundaries were put in place. With regards the peripheral first, the Cameley Park has 'Park' field names encroaching onto Hollowmarsh land. This might suggest a later foundation of a park which butted up to the already established Marsh boundary. On the other hand, the direct correlation of Chewton's meadowland in the Tithe Apportionment and at Domesday suggests that here the Marsh respected a Park boundary already in place. There are no Park names encroaching on the Marsh although they are widespread throughout the surrounding higher ground.

The presence of the Salt Marsh next to the deer park boundary is perplexing. Several opinions were gathered from experienced geologists (Prudden, Stanton, Thomas pers com). All agreed that the geology of the Marsh would allow neither the presence of Salt springs nor the deposits of salts. Another explanation has therefore to be sought for this curious

feature, reference of which can be found in documents dating to 1710 (DD\WG 8,2) Two possibilities have been explored. The first is that the word Salt is a corruption of the Old English 'salh' for Salix or willow (Clark Hall 1960). It is interesting to note the close proximity of the Withey beds to the Salt Marsh. The other possibility explored is the derivation from the words Saltory or Saltatorium meaning a deer-leap (Higham 2003). Could this have been a place where deer could gain access to the deer park? This is an area that has been heavily managed as plantation of late and all archaeological evidence would appear to have been lost. Certainly there are no obvious ditches or banks in the vicinity to support this theory. Therefore CAMP cannot draw any definite conclusions on the matter. Of significance is a deep hollow-way which extends off the Chewton Plain from the direction of the IA/RB settlement area and swings round into the Salt Marsh. Interestingly, part of the bank and walled boundary of the deer park runs alongside this routeway. This again throws into question the chronology of the Marsh. Did the Deer Park respect a pre-existing routeway or did the routeway skirt the Deer park wall? CAMP believes that the former is true and that the Marsh may have been a vital commodity as far back as the Iron Age.

Summary and Conclusion

Hollowmarsh represents an important example of a medieval Common Meadow.

It can be likened to other Common meadowlands in Somerset, such as Curry Rivel (Costen 2011) and Puxton Moor (Cran 1983). What makes it remarkable is the number of manors involved. This would have involved a high degree of co-operation between not only the various Lords of the Manors, but also the tenants who used the resource. CAMP's studies of the Marsh provide an insight into these medieval arrangements with the Full Report providing a manor-by-manor account of its organisation. It is hoped that these two Reports will raise the profile of Hollowmarsh and help preserve its medieval character, giving a greater appreciation into its historical and archaeological background and worth.

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Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries, 1911, Vol 12 pp 108-110

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<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/landandpremises/Landscape/Pages/rurallandscapespdf.aspx> for Hollowmarsh Landscape Character Assessment Chapt.7, 7 consulted 12.9.2010

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=108112> for Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Volume 2: Edward I (1906), file 40, No 537, pp. 323-332 consulted 12.2.2010.

Archive Documents

Cameley

DD/HI/A/270 Estate Map of Cameley 1766

DD/HI/A/272 Estate Map of Cameley 1794

D\D\Rt\M/227 Tithe Map and D\D\Rt\A/227 Apportionment

Chewton Mendip

DD\WG Box 8 no. 2 Survey book of Chewton dated 1650 but compiled 1710-20

DD\WG Box 9, nos 8&9 2 Books of Reference of Chewton 1740

DD\WG\1 Estate Map of Chewton by Rocque 1740

D\D\Rt\M/119 Tithe Map of 1839 and D\D\Rt\A/119 Apportionment

Emborough

D\D\Rt\M/208 Tithe Map c1840 and D\D\Rt\A/208 Apportionment

Farrington Gurney

D\D\Rt\M/284 Tithe Map c1840 and D\D\Rt\A/284 Apportionment

High Littleton

D\D\Rt\M/191 Tithe Map 1839 and D\D\Rt\A/191 Apportionment

Hinton Blewett

D\D\Rt\M/59 Tithe Map 1838 and D\D\Rt\A/59 Apportionment

Litton

D\D\Rt\M/250 Tithe Map 1839 and D\D\Rt\A/250 Apportionment 1838-41

Paulton

D\D\Rt\M/325 Tithe Map 1838 and D\D\Rt\A/325 Apportionment

Ston Easton

D\D\Rt\M/160 Tithe Map 1839 and D\D\Rt\A/160 Apportionment

Welton

T\PH\vch/51 1727, Surveys of Welton Farm, in Midsomer Norton before and after inclosure

Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Volume 2: Edward I (1906), file 40, No 537, pp. 323-332.

Personal Communication

Costen, M. 2009

Prudden, H. 2008

Stanton, W. 2009

Thomas, G. 2010

Appendix 1

Somerset HER details for Chewton Plain

Site number	Site Name and description
25388	Magnetometer Survey 1983 of Worberry Gate, North of Chewton Mendip
16403	Iron Age and Romano-British site, Worberry Gate Chewton Mendip
29857	Excavation 1985, Worberry Gate, Chewton Mendip

Appendix 2

Comparative acreages of Manorial meadowland in Hollowmarsh

Parish	Domesday Acreage 1086	Tithe Acreage c1840
Chewton Mendip	100	90
Cameley	160	158
Farrington Gurney	100	110
Hinton Blewett	60	59
Hallatrow	27	26
Litton	60	70*

* Excluding 'Honeyhill' field

About **C**ommunity **A**rchaeology on the **M**endip **P**lateau

This Community Archaeology Group based in Chewton Mendip was established in 2009 by Pip Osborne to provide an opportunity for interested locals to investigate their environment through multi-disciplinary study, with the greater emphasis being on landscape archaeology.

It seeks to build on the researches of several local archaeologists investigating settlement on the Mendip Plateau with its own investigations followed by publication of its findings.

The study of Hollowmarsh constitutes its first Project and will be followed by a study of Chewton Mendip's medieval Deer Park and the medieval origins of Chewton's settlement.

This report was compiled by Pip Osborne, Colin Budge, Ann Bihan and Rosemary Walker