



MILL MEADOWS BILLERICAY

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



THE MILL ON THE MEADOWS By Susannah Hervey*

Mill Meadows has been a
local nature reserve since 1994.

It has a rich history spanning centuries,
encompassing land, buildings and families,
which has shaped the place it is today...

Leaflet produced by the
Mill Meadows Society (MMS)

Basildon Council
BASILDON • BILLERICAY • WICKFORD



MILL MEADOWS

400AD TO THE 1600S

The land that makes up Mill Meadows can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon period - 400AD when it was part of the Manor of Great Burstead owned by Thane Ingar. A Thane was a man who held land granted by the king.

ODO OF BAYEUX

Following the Norman Conquest in 1066 the manor was given to the brother of William The Conqueror – Odo the Bishop of Bayeux. When Odo fell out of favour The Manor was allocated to various families until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 when Sir Richard Riche took the land. It then passed on to his son Sir Edwin Riche.



THE VOYAGE OF THE MAYFLOWER

A windmill was first recorded on Mill Meadows in the 1560s. This mill is traditionally associated with The Mayflower which sailed from Plymouth across the Atlantic in 1620 with 102 passengers on board, including six from Great Burstead. It is believed the mill provided the flour for The Mayflower's crossing.



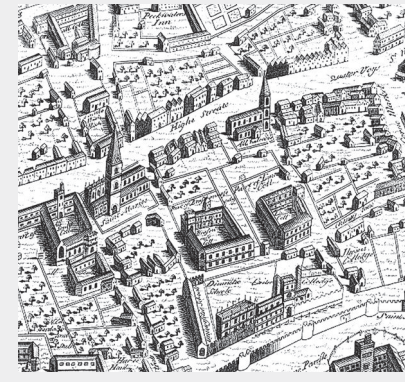
Sir John Petre (1549-1613) had an interest in purchasing the land, and in 1593 employed Ralph Agas to carry out a detailed topographical survey of the Manor of Great Burstead. A list was drawn up describing each piece of land and giving the name of the tenant. This is the earliest document providing information specific to individual fields in Mill Meadows. This first survey shows the windmill and some higher ground, shown on later maps as Windmill Heights and Bell Hill.

William Parker was the first recorded farmer on the site. His land on the North side of Mill Meadows was then known as Harrises.



**SIR JOHN PETRE,
1ST BARON OF WRITTLE**

Portrait can be seen on display at Ingatstone Hall



**PART OF AGAS'S
MAP OF OXFORD**

Part of Agas's map of Oxford (1578; engraved 1588)

RALPH AGAS

Ralph Agas (1540-1621) was an English land surveyor and cartographer. He practiced as a surveyor from 1566. His regular work consisted of drawing up local estate maps and surveys for a variety of clients. He was one of the first estate surveyors to move beyond the traditional practice of compiling purely written descriptions of landed property and to supplement these with maps. His earliest attributed map is of lands at West Lexham, Norfolk in 1575. He later went on to undertake commissions in many other counties including Essex.

MILL MEADOWS

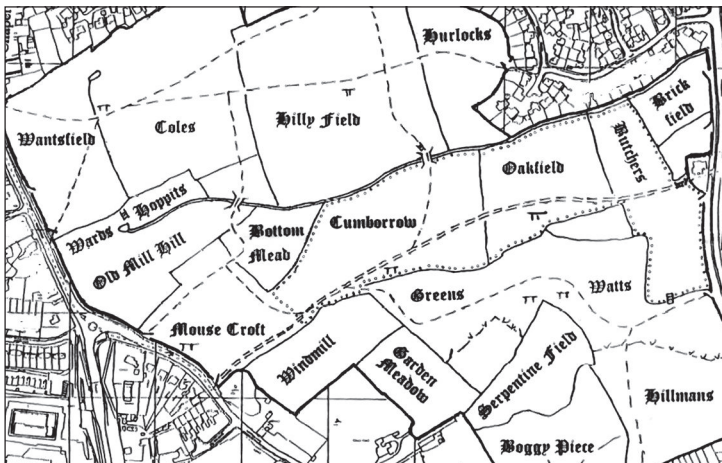
IN THE 1600s

In 1600 Sir Edwin Riche sold the land of Mill Meadows to Sir John Petre, who in 1603 became Baron of Writtle. His estate included three houses - Thorndon Hall, Writtle Park, and Ingatestone Hall and surrounding land.

The Petre family had tenants on their land. These tenants were either freeholders who could sell their tenancy, or copyholders who had to surrender their tenancy through a court of the manor. They were typically 'gentleman farmers' - wealthy businessmen from the City of London or successful local tradesmen who aimed to supplement their income through part-time farming. The only means of transport for goods and people at this time was horse

and carriage, and the Meadows provided convenient grazing for horses as well as grazing for dairy cows, pigs and hens.

In 1615 Ralph Agas carried out a second detailed topographical survey of the manor of Great Burstead. A list was drawn up which described each piece of land and gave the name of the freeholder or copyholder.



**MAP
SHOWING
OLD FIELD
NAMES**

FIELD NAMES

The 17 field names in Mill Meadows are taken from the property transactions that used field and tenants' names to identify them. When Ordnance Survey maps became available in the late 19th century this practice stopped. Mill Meadows today has retained the field names to preserve this ancient tradition.



FROM OAKFIELD TO BUTCHERS

By Jan Westall*

*All paintings are original artwork created by local artists for an exhibition of work inspired by Mill Meadows past and present in August 2018.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1700s

During the 1700s significant advances were made in agricultural productivity. The light clutch plough together with the use of field and crop rotation greatly increased yields.

In 1706 Harrises, comprising land on the north side of Mill Meadows, was owned by the Fishpool family. In 1781 Anna Benigna Johnson, a descendent of Joseph Fishpool inherited it. Her ancestors had the name Hurlock and the land and farmhouse became known as Hurlocks.

Thomas Wood was born in Mill Cottages in 1719. He was famous for his obesity, special diet and subsequent incredible weight loss. Mill Cottages were occupied by millers who operated the windmill next to it and their families.



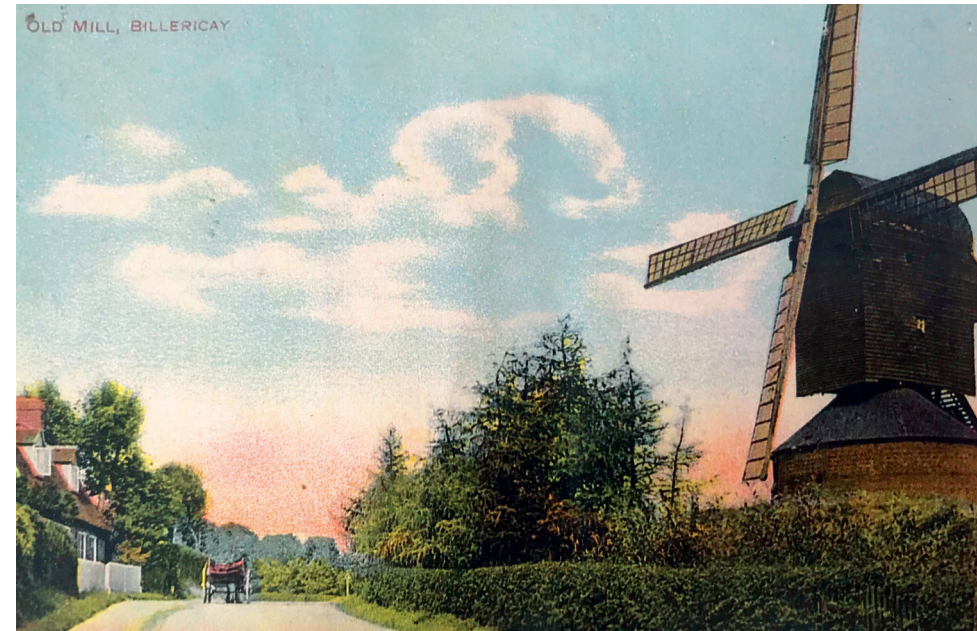
HURLOCKS FARMHOUSE

By Harry Richman (the first curator of the Cater Museum, Billericay)



MILL COTTAGES

By Harry Richman



OLD MILL, BILLERICAY

From postcard

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1700s

Thomas Wood

(1719-1783)

Thomas Wood, the famous 18th century Billericay miller was born on the 30th November 1719 to Abraham and Mary Wood in Mill Cottages which can still be seen at the top of the hill on Southend Road. By the age of 13 he had survived the many illnesses that killed a great number of children at that time, including smallpox. In full health he began a life of self-indulgence, eating and drinking ale to excess. Consequently by the age of 44 his weight had reached enormous proportions, and he began to suffer from ill health including gout, epileptic fits, sickness, bowel pain, headaches, vertigo, sleeplessness, rheumatism, bad moods, low spirits and feelings of suffocation after meals. The community began to refer to him as Billericay's 'Ghastly Miller'.

In desperation he sought advice from the Reverend Powley, a neighbourhood clergyman who suggested he should change his eating habits and recommended a book by Luigi Cornaro, a 17th century Italian dietician. The recommended diet was to eat a pudding made from seabiscuits mixed with boiled skimmed milk and eggs. He was to abstain from alcohol, drink only water and avoid all forms of animal fat, full fat milk and butter, surviving solely on the pudding.

He took cold baths two to three times a day, exercised with dumbbells and strictly controlled his sleep. This strict regime and vegetarian, dairy-free diet worked very well for Thomas and over a period of two to three years his weight decreased dramatically and his health was completely restored. More details can be found about Thomas's diet on our website www.millmeadows.org.uk

Due to superstition Thomas never allowed himself to be weighed, either before his diet or afterwards, however it is estimated that he lost between ten and eleven stone in weight.

This restrictive lifestyle soon earned Thomas the name 'the Abstemious Miller'. His recovery was so successful that it was reported in the 'Gentleman's Magazine' in London. He began to receive letters from the public asking for his advice and a cure for obesity. Some requested his portrait which he duly commissioned.

From the letters Thomas wrote it soon became evident he was not the greedy, 'Ghastly Miller' which he had been labelled. He was in fact a caring man, who looked after his horses well, ensuring they were well treated and not overworked. He was an acknowledged expert cultivator of auriculas, and often held open days at the mill to display his plants.

Thomas held the public office post of 'Overseer of the Poor', which entailed administering relief for the poor in the form of money, food, and clothing, perhaps indicating a compassionate nature. He was a religious man and worshipped at St Mary Magdalene Church in Great Burstead. Thomas was married to Elizabeth Finch (1724-1801) and had two children, Thomas and Elizabeth, and six grandchildren.

Thomas died of bowel inflammation in 1783 aged sixty-three. He is buried in St Mary Magdalene Church in Great Burstead with his grandson John Finch Wood who died in 1797 aged 4 years. His wife lies at his side. His gravestone can be found in the churchyard today.



PORTRAIT OF THOMAS WOOD

This can be found in the Cater Museum, Billericay High Street along with two of his tankards

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1700s

Gatwick House is located on the south side of Mill Meadows, now outside the boundary of the nature reserve. There has been a building on this site since 1593. Work took place to the rear of the building in 1745 and in 1767 a brick facade, erected on the front the house, brought its appearance to the one we see today.

The house was then owned by Philip Davies, minister of the Old Meeting House in Chapel Street (now the United Reformed Church) and at the time was known as Mill Hill House. It later passed into the ownership of John Price.



CLOCK TOWER, GATWICK HOUSE

by Stephen Burdett*



GATWICK HOUSE, BILLERICAY, DATE?

Kindly reproduced by permission of the Cater Museum, Billericay



MILL MEADOWS, BILLERICAY, FROM POSTCARD

In 1777 Thomas Wood built a second mill on Mill Meadows, positioned further along Southend Road between the original mill and School Road. His grandson, William Wood (1796-1866) later went on to run this mill, while his brother, Finch Wood (1800-1876) ran the original mill. They all resided at Mill Cottages.

It is believed that the two windmills gave Mill Meadows its name.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1700s

In 1787 John Ward (1762-1849), a wealthy businessman from Surrey purchased Lockers Hall from John Price. This purchase followed the marriage of his sister Mary to Peter D'Aranda who was appointed curate at St Mary Magdalene, Great Burstead the same year, bringing them to the area. Lockers Hall is an impressive three storey house which still faces the fields from the opposite side of Southend Road, with a magnificent cedar tree, believed to be around 200 years old, in the front garden.



LOCKERS HALL FROM POSTCARD

1793-1815 FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS

During this war time period there were shortages of food due to restricted imports increasing the prices of agricultural produce. Together with the declining costs of production, farming became a much more profitable activity. Essex was within easy range and already popular with businessmen based in London and so became an even more tempting prospect for them.

John Ward, while residing at Lockers Hall, may have noticed this investment opportunity and from 1808 he continued his process of acquisition of much of the farmland which comprises Mill Meadows today.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1800s

In 1808 John Ward purchased Gatwick House. It remained in the ownership of the Ward family until 1961. During these years it was tenanted by a succession of wealthy people whose servants resided with them and also at Greens Farmhouse.



GATWICK HOUSE, BILLERICAY, C1900, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

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MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1800s

In 1812 John Ward purchased Greens Farm, situated on the high ground between Gatwick House and Greens Farm Lane, the farmhouse being located in the field we now refer to as Greens.

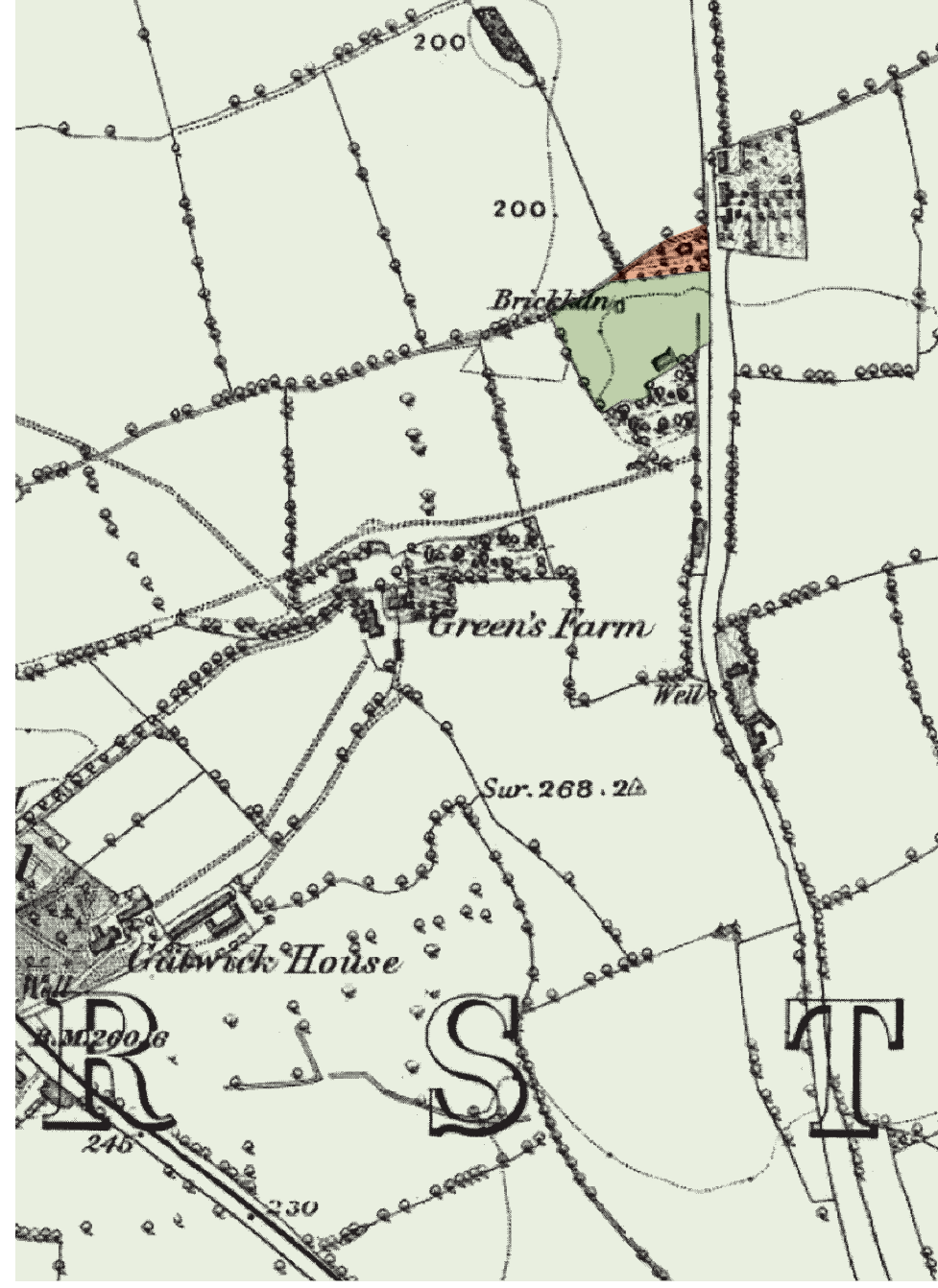
The farmhouse was the home of the farmer of Greens, his family and workers.

By 1839 Greens Farm and Hurlocks Farm covered most of the land we now know as Mill Meadows. This area comprised of 85 acres with 3 farmhouses all sub-tenanted and farmed by Phillip Tylor from 1829, Hurlocks being purchased by him in 1846.

A smaller farm known as Oak Farm was located on the eastern side of Southend Road, immediately opposite Hickstars Lane, comprising 25 acres of land. This was also owned by John Ward from 1839 and occupied by various tenants until its sale in 1945. Although the land that comprised Oak Farm does not form part of Mill Meadows Local Nature Reserve today, it formed part of the Gatwick Estate.

Between 1851 and 1871 Greens Farmhouse was converted into two weather-boarded semi-detached cottages and from 1861 it was used as a home for the servants from Gatwick House and their families.

Brickmaking took place in the field we now call Brickfields during the mid 1800s to serve local demands. The 1874 Ordnance Survey map (shown on the next page) shows a brick kiln in this field (marked in dark green). Plover Cottage and an orchard were in the small triangular adjacent field (marked in light orange).



SECTION OF 1881 ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP

Showing Brick kiln and orchard

Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1800s

In 1866 William Wood, the miller of the original windmill and resident of Mill Cottages died. The new miller and resident of Mill Cottages was Robert Agnis.



PHOTOGRAPH SHOWING MILL COTTAGES AND WINDMILL

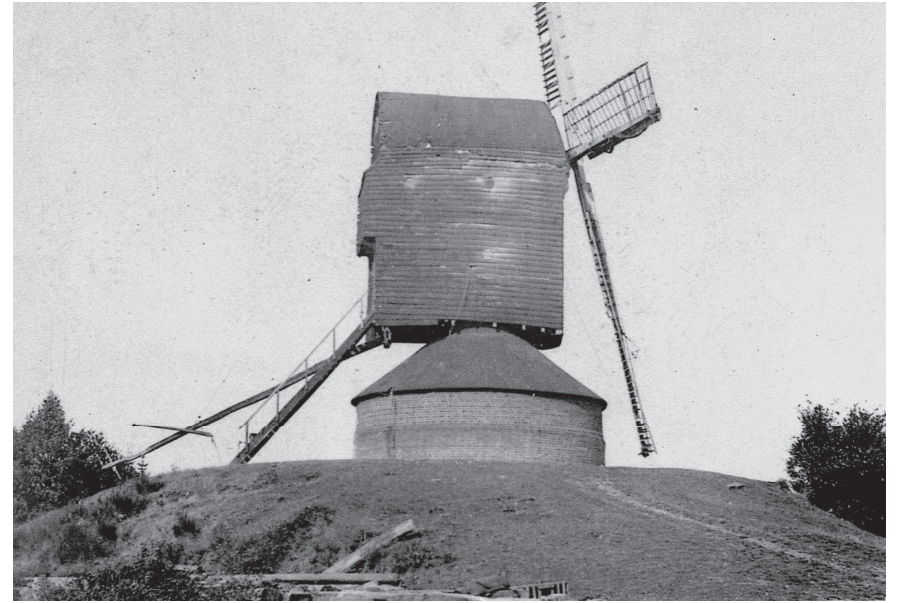
Kindly reproduced by permission of Roger Green



PICNIC NEAR BILLERICAY MILL, INTACT, PHOTOGRAPHER AND DATE UNKNOWN

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In 1868 Henry Ward paid £100 to George Wood (1804-1877), brother of millers William and Finch Wood, for land including the windmill and cottages, increasing the Ward family ownership of the land of Mill Meadows.



BILLERICAY MILL, INTACT, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, DATE UNKNOWN

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When Philip Tylor died in 1870, Hurlocks Farm passed to his son-in-law and owner of the foundry and gas works in Laindon Road - Job Jeffery Salter. A few years later in 1879 Alexander Ward (1852-1907), Henry Ward's second eldest son, purchased Hurlocks Farm comprising 25 acres. The Ward family then owned Greens Farm, Hurlocks Farm and Oak Farm.

Together this area was known as 'The Gatwick Estate'.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1800s

In 1874, Lockers Hall, in the ownership of John Henry Ward, is listed on an ordnance survey map as being a grammar school.



POSTCARD OF LOCKERS HALL, BILLERICAY

From c1875 the price of grain began to fall due to the import of grain from America. This strongly contributed to an agricultural depression and the decline of milling in England. The railway did not arrive in Billericay until 1888 so people were still heavily dependent on horse and carriage for travel and transport. With the main focus of land use on grazing,

Mill Meadows remained well placed to keep horses tended and fed and the land remained important for this purpose. In 1892 the sails were removed from the 18th century windmill built by Thomas Wood and the mill itself was later demolished. As this was before mainstream photography no photographs exist of this mill. By 1919 houses had been built on the site.

In 1894 John Henry Ward's brother, Alexander Ward, moved into Lockers Hall as a tenant of his brothers. In 1895 he married Florence and Lockers became their family home until their deaths in 1907 and 1943 respectively. They had no children.



MRS WARD OF LOCKERS

Photograph can be found in the Cater Museum, Billericay High Street

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1900s

In 1907 Alexander Ward died, passing ownership of Hurlocks Farm and Farmhouse to his nephew Henry Ward (1886-1965).

On the death of his father, John Henry Ward in 1911, Henry Ward inherited Greens Farm, Gatwick House, Lockers Hall, Mill Cottages and windmill and associated land, putting the entire Gatwick Estate, and all of the land comprising Mill Meadows in his ownership.

By 1908 Robert Agnis was in residence at Mill Cottages and worked the mill with Robert Walker, who took over as the last Billericay miller following Agnis's death in 1914. By this time milling was well into decline and it is unclear when it finally came to an end in Billericay. With the end of milling the Ward family began to use the cottages as homes for the chauffeur/gardeners working for Florence Ward at Lockers Hall and for the Faber family, tenants of Gatwick House.



POSTCARD SHOWING MILL COTTAGES

Horses still played an important role in transport in the first half of the 1900s, with the reliance on cars not beginning until after the Second World War (1939-1945). Horses therefore still played a key role in transport and so grazing fields were essential.

During the First World War (1914-18) both Hurlocks and Greens Farm were used for grazing for horses and cattle with six acres of Hurlocks Farm being used for growing wheat. The windmill was used as an observation post.

In 1916 George Butcher became the tenant of Hurlocks Farm, with 63 acres. The land was used for crops, cattle and horse grazing.



DERELICT POST MILL WITH HORSE AND CART, BILLERICAY

Postcard, by Reginald Wailes (1901-1986), from Mills Archive

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1900s



**BILLERICAY MILL, IN HEAVY SNOW,
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN,
DATE UNKNOWN**

Kindly reproduced by permission of
the Cater Museum, Billericay

In November 1928 the windmill
collapsed following a severe storm the
previous night. Pictures of the derelict
and collapsed mill can be found on
the Mills Archive website:

[millsarchive.org/explore/mills/entry/2689/
billericay-mill-great-burstead#Sources](https://millsarchive.org/explore/mills/entry/2689/billericay-mill-great-burstead#Sources)

*From 1934 Greens Farmhouse and the surrounding land was
leased by John Henry Ward to Philip and Ada Watts who
used it for keeping horses for their haulage business.*

Phillip and Ada Watts were the
grandparents of Jim Watts, the first
Chairman of the Mill Meadows Society.
Later the farm expanded to include
cows, cattle, pigs and chickens.

By 1941 100 hens, 50 ducks and
16 geese had been added to
Hurlocks Farm. The Butcher family is
remembered for delivering milk using
pails suspended from a yoke, by
bike and horse and cart.



**ADA WATTS, STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF THE BOILER HOUSE,
GREENS FARM WHERE PIGSWILL WAS PREPARED**

Photograph kindly reproduced by permission of Betty Jacobson nee Watts

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1900s

During the Second World War (1939-45) The Watts family were instructed to plough up ten acres of Greens Farm to grow oats. After the war these fields reverted to grazing pasture.

Following the war in 1945 two fields from Oak Farm were purchased from Henry Ward by Billericay District Council to build urgently required housing in the form of pre-fabricated, temporary houses, designed to last ten years. Those in Beams Way were not replaced by permanent brick built housing until the 1960s.

In 1960 Oak Farmhouse was demolished to make way for the realignment of Southend Road.

In 1961 Greens Farm, Hurlocks Farm and Gatwick House were sold by Henry Ward to the Metropolitan Railway Country Estates (MRCE) for development. Gatwick House was tenanted and spent some time as a dental surgery. The Watts family continued to lease Greens Farm and remained in the farmhouse.

In the 1960s the MRCE built Abbots Rise, the extension of South Ridge and Northfield Close. Prower Close, Martin Close and Langemore Way were built by Broseley Estates.



WORKING SCENE, GREENS FARM

Photograph kindly reproduced by permission of Betty Jacobson nee Watts

THE METROPOLITAN RAILWAY COUNTRY ESTATES (MRCE)

The Metropolitan Railway was a passenger and goods railway that served London from 1863 to 1933, its main line ran up through north-west London. It was the first underground line in 1863.

In order to boost its profits the Metropolitan Railway needed more passengers. So in 1919 a separate limited company, The Metropolitan Railway Country Estates (MRCE), was set up to manage and develop its nearby land into housing estates. These housing estates were to establish a ready market of commuters in and out of London, creating a significant rise in ticket sales.

Between 1919 and 1933 the MRCE developed a series of private housing estates all down the line at Neasden, Wembley Park, Northwick Park, Eastcote, Rayners Lane, Ruislip, Hillingdon, Pinner, Rickmansworth, Chorley Wood and Amersham. In the early days the estates company built some houses itself, but the usual pattern was to lay out an estate and then sell plots to individual purchasers wishing to have a house built to their own specifications. Later on the design and construction was usually undertaken by other companies.

Advertisers coined the phrase Metro-land, painting a picture of rural charm within easy reach of the city to entice people to settle there. Londoners came in their droves, sold the dream of a new home on the edge of beautiful countryside but with modern conveniences including a fast rail service to central London. Development continued to the north-west of London in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex. In the 1950s the MRCE acquired sites in Runcorn and Alkington.



MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1900s

A Summary of the Gatwick Estate

The Gatwick Estate was an area of almost 150 acres centred around Gatwick House including all the land lying between Southend Road and Greens Farm Lane and reaching as far as South Green. The proportion of land

allocated to each farm varied from time to time and it was all occupied by tenant farmers. Between 1787 and 1962 the Gatwick Estate was owned and managed by four generations of the Ward family.

DATE	PERSON	ACTION	PART OF THE ESTATE
1787	John Ward	Purchased	Lockers Hall
1808	John Ward	Purchased	Gatwick House
1812	John Ward	Purchased	Greens Farm
1849	John Ward dies	Passed to son Henry Ward (1801-1872)	Lockers Hall, Gatwick House, Greens Farm, Oak Farm
1868	Henry Ward	Purchased	Windmills and Mill Cottages
1872	Henry Ward dies	Passed to eldest son John Henry Ward (1849-1911)	Lockers Hall, Gatwick House, Greens Farm, Oak Farm, Mill Cottages and windmills
1879	Alexander Ward	Purchased	Hurlocks Farm
1907	Alexander Ward dies	Passed to nephew Henry Ward (1886-1965)	Hurlocks Farm
1911	John Henry Ward dies	Passed to son Henry Ward (1886-1965)	Lockers Hall, Gatwick House, Greens Farm, Oak Farm, Mill Cottages and windmills
1945	Henry Ward	Sold to Billericay District Council for housing	Two fields from Oak Farm
1961	Henry Ward	Sold to Metropolitan Railway Country Estates for development	Greens Farm, Hurlocks Farm, Gatwick House
1962	Henry Ward	Sold	Lockers Hall

In 1962 Lockers Hall was sold by Henry Ward shortly before his death in 1965, so ending the link with Mill Meadows to the Ward family.



In 1970 The MRCE purchased the lease for Greens Farm from the Watts family, this agreement bringing farming at Greens to a close. Gatwick House and ten acres of land was sold by the MRCE to Mr Neil Watson who still lives there today.

In the late 1970s the estate around Stonechat Road was built leaving the rest to waste.

By then, nothing visible remained of Plover Cottage in Brickfield. The mill stones were removed from the windmill although remains of the mill could still be seen in the undergrowth. Much of Greens Farm became encroached by new woodland and scrub and the farmhouse fell into disrepair.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 1900s

In 1980 dairy farming ceased at Hurlocks. Hurlocks Farmhouse was almost demolished but was rescued and modernised and survives today as a private residence. It can be found on Greens Farm Lane, opposite Cavell Road.



FRONT OF HURLOCKS FARMHOUSE, 1980

From The Lost Farms of Billericay, John James, 2nd addition, 2003

In 1991 planning permission for the Mill Grange Estate around Goldcrest Drive was granted. This permission was dependent on Basildon District Council purchasing the remainder (around 90 acres) from the MRCE, for recreational and social purposes.

In 1994 Basildon Council decided to manage the site as a Local Nature Reserve, and has continued to do so. The council established a management regime in which some of the existing scrub and woodland around the south west and in other pockets throughout the site are kept. The main areas of grassland are managed and conserved and the old hedgerows that make up the field boundaries are kept and filled as necessary, making them virtually unchanged since the late 1600s.

From 1996 a number of local residents expressed an interest in helping the Council with management tasks. The Mill Meadows Society was launched in 1998 with the purpose of participating alongside Basildon District Council in the management and conservation of the reserve, to offer information, advice and assistance and encourage public interest and participation on the management and conservation of the reserve.

In July 1999 17 acres of Mill Meadows were designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because it is one of the finest ancient meadow systems in Essex. This is the result of the fields being mostly undisturbed by ploughing or artificial fertilisation for centuries, creating the ideal conditions for a diversity of flowers and fungi.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 2000s AND TODAY

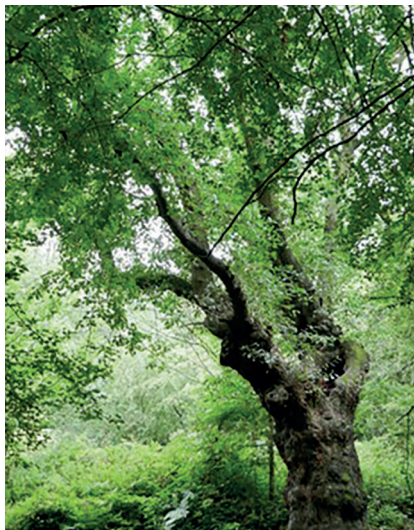
In 2001 Basildon Council formally introduced cattle grazing as a conservation measure to maintain the priority grassland habitat and particularly the SSSI on the reserve, although cattle were grazing the site before then.



RED POLL CATTLE, MAY 2018

The Red Poll cattle, a docile breed, were introduced in 2014. Keeping the grass short by grazing has resulted in the increase in some important wildflower species, especially the Heath Spotted Orchids.

Marked trails, providing walks of interest were installed around the site in 2007, funded by the National Lottery 'Awards for All' grant scheme.



TO THE BLUEBELLS

By Jean Willoughby*

In 2011 twelve species of waxcup fungi were found, making Mill Meadows a site of national importance.

In September 2017 the society received a Heritage Lottery Funded Grant to improve and enhance the footpaths and bridges and create new, informative walks around the reserve.

Following a tree survey in 2017 which followed the Department for Environmental Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) criteria, approximately 100 veteran trees (a tree which shows ancient characteristics) have been identified on Mill Meadows, particularly in the hedgerows.

MILL MEADOWS

IN THE 2000s AND TODAY

Gatwick House, Hurlocks Farmhouse, Lockers Hall and Mill Cottages are all grade II listed and survive as private residences today.

A mound in the garden of Mill Cottages is all that can be seen of the last remaining windmill. Both Billericay School and Mill Meadows use a windmill as their logo in memory of the mills.

The foundations of Greens Farmhouse are still on Mill Meadows.

The Mill Meadows Society continues to be active with events and work parties taking place regularly. Mill Meadows is used and enjoyed by the local community.

Further historical information can be found on the Mill Meadows website millmeadows.org.uk

Additional pictures of the windmill, complete and derelict can be found on the Mills Archive website: millsarchive.org/explore/mills/entry/2689/billericay-mill-great-burstead#Sources



FEBRUARY 2018



SUMMER MORNING WALK

By Jo Adshead*



MILL MEADOWS

Leaflet produced by the Mill Meadows Society (MMS)
millmeadows.org.uk