

## Farming Heritage of Cliffe

Cliffe was well populated during Roman times and six farming settlements have been uncovered. They used the land mainly for stock rearing and cereal farming and also caught fish in the River Thames in cages.

In Saxon times (pre 791) the Manor of Cliffe was given to the Priory of Christchurch in Canterbury. Cliffe was dominated by agriculture and the vast majority of its inhabitants would have worked on the land. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century crops such as barley, oats, rye, beans and peas were being grown and the monks had begun to build seawalls creating more land which they leased and it was used for the grazing of sheep which were kept not only for wool but would have been used to make milk and butter, whilst the dung was a valued manure. Under Henry VIII (1491-1547) the monasteries were dissolved and their lands confiscated and the Manor of Cliffe was sold to Lord Cobham. During the Middle Ages farming in Cliffe was based around the manorial system and land remained un-enclosed. As late as 1778 Cliffe had the largest known open field in Kent, some two thousand acres which was carefully divided into numerous strips. Redham Mead on the marshes also remained un-enclosed meadow land which was divided into 174 parcels of land, the largest was 7 acres and the smallest 14 perches.

Courtsole Farm, on the edge of Cliffe marshes, had a dairy and a dairy herd throughout the 1900's and there was a nursery at Newlands Farm that supplied flowers to Covent Garden.

The vast majority of the land in the parish of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods is still farmed today and the land is of the highest agricultural grade. It is mostly arable with sheep and cattle grazing on the marshes. Cliffe has seen some changes in farming, some of the fruit orchards have now disappeared and farmers have reverted the arable farming on the marshes back to grazing marsh (farmers were encouraged by the government during the 1970's to grow crops on the marshes) The grazing of sheep and cattle on the marshes is so important to the precious wildlife that it sustains. The grazing keeps the grass at just the right height for many of our most important breeding birds such as skylarks and lapwing and the ditch systems support a myriad of flora and fauna and provide a wonderful larder for the herons at Northward Hill during the breeding season.



West Court in 1937

Every autumn we offer our thanks for a good harvest in St Helens Church where there is also a Harvest Supper.

For more information on farming in the area '*The Hoo Peninsula*' by Philip MacDougall.

# North Kent Marshes Self Guided Trails Cliffe Farming Heritage Trail

Distance approximately 3 miles



Manors Farm in the 1930's re-built after the fire in 1905

A circular trail through Cliffe's rich farming heritage. Please take care on the road sections

Other trails in this series;

Wildlife Heritage Trail  
Military Heritage Trail  
Heritage Buildings Trail  
Industrial Heritage Trail

Literary Heritage along the Saxon Shore Way



# Cliffe Farming Heritage Trail

A circular trail starting at St Helens Church Cliffe then turn right along Buttway Lane



Sheep grazing on Cliffe Marshes



Cattle on Cliffe Marshes



Manor Farm Ploughing Match 1950's



Harvest at Cliffe 1923. This field is now the bowling green and recreation ground at Norwood Corner



Working at Manor Farm



Fruit baskets on the platform at Cliffe Station



Fruit pickers at Perry Hill



The fields south of Norwood Corner in Station Road were