

**Sketches of Leek Wootton and Hill Wotton dated 1818**

**CR1709/320/4-5**

For the New Year we bring you, not one, but two documents for Document of the Month! We have chosen a pair of sketches of the village of Leek Wootton and neighbouring hamlet Hill Wootton, dated to 1818. The sketches are taken from the collection CR1709, within the client papers of Twist & Sons solicitors of Coventry, who managed the estate of Robert Harvey Mallory Esquire, of Woodcote, Leek Wootton.



Sketch of Leek Wootton, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1709/320/4-5



Sketch of Hill Wootton, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1709/320/4-5

The sketches on display were drawn on paper by surveyor R Ladbury and detail the fields and meadows, in and around the settlements in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The

scale used in both the sketches is given as '5 chains to an inch'<sup>1</sup>, where five chains is equal to 100.58 metres<sup>2</sup>, meaning one inch represents 20.11684m. The sketches reflect hints of colour to distinguish certain features, such as blue for the river Avon and other pools of water, yellow for the roads from Warwick, Woodcote, Kenilworth and Stoneleigh, pink and green borders show ownership boundaries and solid colours of red and green are used for buildings. The land is shown to be open, with fields and meadows individually named and then split using dotted lines into smaller furlongs, which are again ascribed a name. Towards the centre of each sketch where buildings are concentrated, the land is divided up and labelled with the name of a specific landowner. We can see prominent local family names such as Greatheed (Bertie Greatheed of Guys Cliffe), Leigh (John Henry Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey) and Clarendon (Thomas Earl of Clarendon) as well as Mallory of Woodcote.

### Land enclosure

Robert Harvey Mallory Esquire (c.1757-1820<sup>3</sup>) with his family (wife Ann and children Henry, Mary-Ann and Harriet<sup>4</sup>) owned Woodcote House and its estate at the time the sketches were drawn. The Woodcote estate is shown to the north-west of the 1818 sketch of Leek Wootton. Although we don't know the reason why the sketches were made, they were included with other Mallory family documents that had connections to the enclosure of Leek Wootton. The land was privately owned, but those in the local community had rights of access and rights to use the land. In what was known as an open field system, tenants were able to cultivate strips of land for growing crops, their livestock were allowed to graze without restriction, and they were able to gather wood and collect water from the rivers and streams. However, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the practice of enclosure became particularly widespread as Acts of Parliament, ended the traditional rights on common land. The Acts reorganised the agricultural landscape and crucially gave landowners the right to limit access, 'to make greater profits... and for a more efficient way of managing their land'<sup>5</sup>. This meant that commons, wasteland and open fields formally became enclosed units of

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<sup>1</sup> *Sketches of Leek Wootton and Hill Wootton*, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR1790/320/4-5

<sup>2</sup> Converted using Metric Conversions <https://www.metric-conversions.org/length/chains-to-meters.htm> (accessed 16/12/24)

<sup>3</sup> Information gathered from Ancestry.com

<https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/search/collections/60859/records/1062371> (accessed 17/12/24)

<sup>4</sup> Information gathered from Ancestry.com

<https://www.ancestryinstitution.com/search/collections/5111/records/83289> (accessed 17/12/24)

<sup>5</sup> RuralHistoria, *The Enclosure Act's impact on British Landscapes*, <https://ruralhistoria.com/2023/05/24/enclosure-act/> (accessed 16/12/24)

land, arable land changed to pasture and large areas of communally farmed land were partitioned into small fields farmed by individuals<sup>6</sup>.

### Leek Wootton enclosure

In 1822, Richard Court of Birmingham, Gentleman, was appointed a commissioner to enclose the land within the parish of Leek Wootton<sup>7</sup>. The enclosure award and accompanying map held by Warwickshire County Record Office (reference DR0038/13) provides the legal record of the redistribution of this land, proving ownership and the boundaries of the landholdings. There are many beneficiaries including Henry Mallory of Woodcote, who was the son of Robert Harvey Mallory. As well as other parcels of land, Mallory was awarded 'Yards End Field, Rams Hill Field, Meadow Furlong, Broomy Leys, Ashow Meadow and Blakedown Mill Meadow<sup>8</sup>'. This large area of land can be seen in the eastern part of the 1818 sketch of Hill Wootton.

As the sketches on display pre-date this enclosure, they can provide useful information regarding land use and the boundaries of the traditional open field system in Leek Wootton and Hill Wootton. Only four years after they were drawn, considerable changes were to come to this rural landscape in the form of fences, hedging and walls, which would transform a community and their centuries-old, agrarian way of life.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Archives, *Enclosure awards and maps*, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/enclosure-awards/> (accessed 16/12/24)

<sup>7</sup> *Leek Wootton Enclosure Award, Warwickshire County Record Office, DR0038/13*

<sup>8</sup> *Leek Wootton Enclosure Award, Warwickshire County Record Office, DR0038/13*