

LANDSCAPE

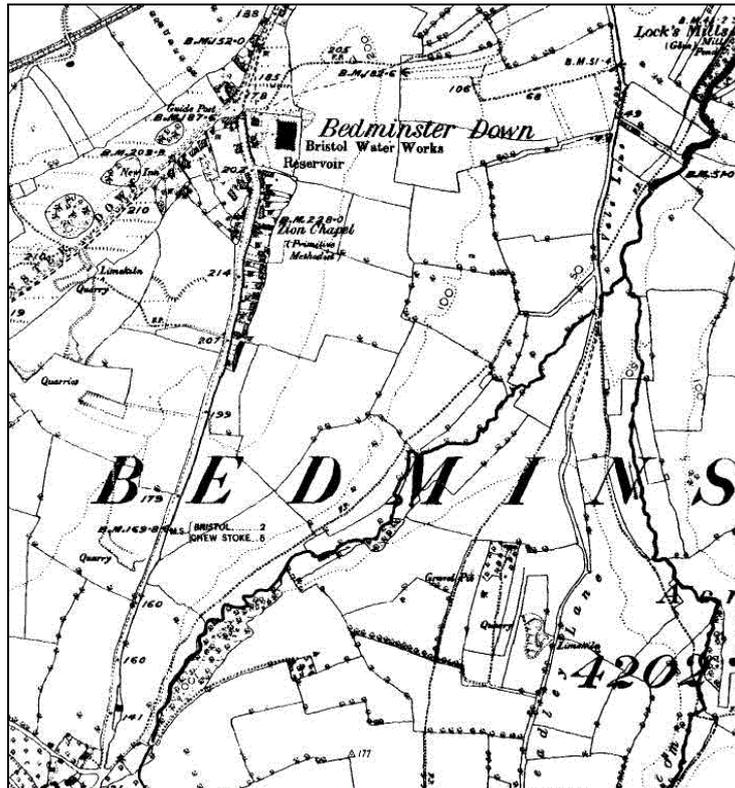
The Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges National Character Area (NCA) encompasses the City of Bristol, and the surrounding area including the Chew and Yeo valleys, Keynsham, Clevedon, Portishead and parts of the Cotswolds and Mendip Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area is characterised by alternating ridges and broad valleys, with some steep, wooded slopes and open rolling farmland. Although the urban area covering this NCA is significant at over 21 per cent, much of the surrounding rural landscape is farmed.

The Landscape Character Type of the area including Manor Woods Valley is classified as 'urban' i.e., an extensive area of predominantly built land where the rural settlement pattern has been completely subsumed by urban development.



South Bristol viewed from Dundry

A series of Ordnance Survey maps of 1880's to the 1916 show a steady, but slow, reduction in field boundaries within fields in Manor Woods Valley.



Manor Woods Valley in 1884 showing hedgerows and notable trees

By 1903 linear housing development was progressing southwards along Bishopsworth Road.

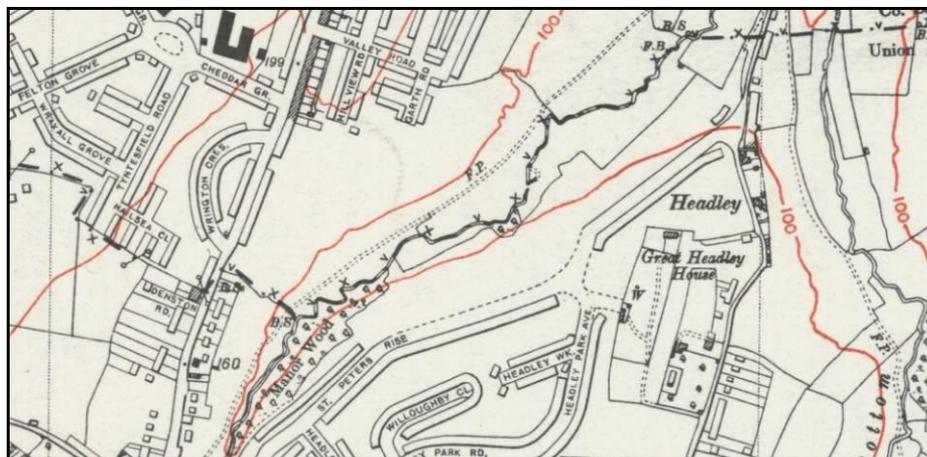


Manor Woods Valley from across Bedminster Down – c1926



...the same view - 2020

Much farmland immediately to the southeast of Old Manor Wood was lost to the developments associated with St Peter's Rise, which commenced in 1935. St Peter's Rise road was adopted by the local authority in 1937. In 1938 St Peter's Rise was mapped out, but shown as incomplete. Houses along Headley Farm track at the southwest end of St Peter's Rise are 'blocked out', but not shown as individual properties.



1938 - Incomplete St Peter's Rise and 'blocked-out' properties along its southwest end.

The landscape of Manor Woods Valley and its immediate environs were affected by the Second World War when 'Dig for Victory' allotments were established along the northwest side of the valley in 1939. The post-war abandonment of the allotments allowed for the formation of Allotment Wood (see relevant section in this essay).

Development along St Peter's Rise was halted during the war, presumably as builders and material were diverted to repairing bomb damage in the city.

On Good Friday (11th April) 1941, a stray bomb dropped by a Luftwaffe bomber that was aiming for the harbour and industrial installations in South West and West Central Bristol, as well as Avonmouth and Portishead Docks, leveled four, five-year old houses, namely 49 to 55 St Peter's Rise. None of the occupants were hurt, but two families had to be dug out of their back-garden air-raid shelters, and all the families involved lost all their material possessions. A total of 193 tons of high explosives and 36,888 incendiaries were dropped on Bristol that night, killing 180 people and injuring a further 382. Five out of the fifteen German aircraft involved were lost. This was the last night of the main Blitz on Bristol. The houses were rebuilt in 1948.

The Bomb Crater in the southwest end of Old Manor Wood was created on the night of 14th May 1944, during the 'Baby Blitz' when a 500lb landmine bomb exploded. Again no one was hurt when this bomb exploded. A gentleman who was an infant at the time, told how his mother, on hearing the air raid sirens, gathered him from his cradle, in their house on Kings Head Lane, before making her way to an air raid shelter. A piece of shrapnel from the latter bomb went through the roof of their house and through the cradle!

That night 91 aircraft flew to Bristol to bomb the harbour installations. A total of 68 aircraft subsequently claimed to have attacked the city; however, in spite of the German claims only five bombs actually fell within the Bristol city boundary. These came down at around 02.00 hrs in Headley Park (including the one that landed in Manor Woods Valley), and at Kings Weston where a searchlight site was destroyed, killing an operator from the 68th

Searchlight Regiment. He was the last person to lose his life in Bristol as a result of enemy action during World War Two. The attacking force lost 14 aircraft; 11 over Southern England, with three more crashing in France. The 'All Clear' was sounded at 03.07 hrs on the morning of 15th May 1944

In 1945 the Air Photo Division was established in Ordnance Survey, utilising the surplus aircraft, film and personnel from the RAF. The extensive RAF aerial photographic survey of Great Britain (1944-1950), called Operation Revue, was also intended to assist town planning and road building. The allotments, fields, surviving field boundaries, Manor Wood and the pre-war development along the southern side of St Peters Rise and part of its northern edge are evident in an Operation Revue aerial photograph of about 1949.



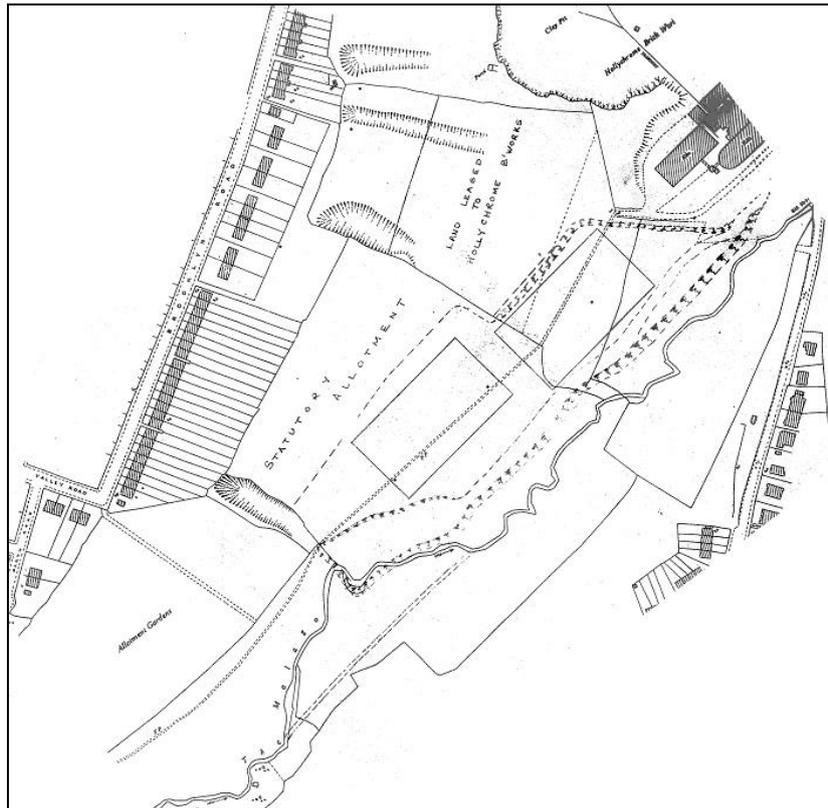
Oblique aerial photograph of c1949



...the same view in 2020

In about 1950 the hedgerows in the Wildflower Meadow, Lower Park and other open spaces, were removed, thus turning Manor Woods Valley in to the public open space that we know today. At the same time, the Malago was straightened from where The Dam now stands, downstream parallel to, and to half way down the length of, Crantock Avenue, which was being built at the time.

There was considerable re-grading of the lower end of the area now known as the Wildflower Meadow and of the Lower Park. Playing fields were created on the former area. Two football pitches used by Parson Street Old Boys Football Club were marked out. These are shown on a hand annotated BCC map of January 1951. The playing fields existed for about 25 years. A bank on the edge of the playing fields is remembered by some. This was probably that indicated to the southeast of the footpath.



Hand annotated map of 31 January 1951 showing re-graded areas and football pitches

Immediately after the Second World War the whole of the area presently covered by the Wildflower Meadow, the Rabbit Field, Manor Woods Orchard the Quarries, and the modern industrial estate at the southeast end of Vale Lane, was designated as a landfill site. Whilst the deep clay pits in the Orchard were certainly filled with waste in the 1960's; based on mapping and conflicting anecdotal evidence, it is not at all clear that the Wildflower Meadow was likewise utilized, at least to any great extent. Local children used to be able to play football in the area during the 1960's and the Wildflower Meadow has never been mapped as 'Landfill' or 'Tip' by the Ordnance Survey.



Map of area designated as landfill in 1945 (pink cross-hatch) overlain on map of present-day Manor Woods Valley with part of Vale Lane Industrial Estate.

1972 mapping shows Manor Woods Valley more or less its current form, with all former field boundaries having been removed in the open park areas. The relatively steep former farmland at the northeast end of the original Manor Wood had become isolated by the final phase of housing development along St Peter's Rise in the 1960's. This area was then subject to natural vegetation succession resulting in New Manor Wood. Through the 1980's and 90's the former allotments site gave way to scrub then woodland that became the Allotment Wood.

Preventing invasion of the remaining open parkland by scrub has always been a problem in Manor Woods Valley. In 1999 The South Bristol Rivers Initiative sponsored some scrub clearance that was designed to produce bays giving more boundary habitats.