

1st June 2022

History of RSPB Old Moor, Dearne Valley

I have a small Genealogy business and for the last 12 or so years my main objective has been dealing with researching people and not places. But a couple of months ago I was asked by Liz to look into the history of Old Moor. It was an opportunity for me to broaden my horizons and I have loved the challenge so far. Thank you for the opportunity.

I was given a blank canvas so that was a big help as I had no plan and would just make it up as I went along.

As I am partial to collecting old maps then I would start there. A visit to Rotherham and Barnsley Archives confirms that it is on the boundary so a couple of the maps had bits missing. Using The National Library of Scotland it was possible to acquire a range of maps dating from 1849, 1888, 1901, 1916, 1952 and 2012. These show us the enormous changes in the whole area over a period of 170 years. There have been railway lines, sidings, coal tips, flooded land agricultural land and even an emergency airstrip during WW2. The land was eventually acquired, cleaned up and become the wonderful world we all know today as RSPB Old Moor. Paradise in the Dearne Valley.

When I've completed the research (although I suspect this will be an ongoing task) the fuller picture will be logged. In the meantime these are a few highlights.....

According to the stone above the entrance to the shop we can see a date of 1755 engraved. Potentially this is the date that the building was built.

After a search of old newspapers courtesy of Lancashire Library I turned up an advert in the Leeds Intelligencer dated 10th May 1757. A horse was stolen from Old Moor pastures. It was the property of Edward Bramald of Wombwell and there was one guinea reward. It's probable that Edward Bramald was the first farmer to live at Old Moor.

I have found tax assessments between 1790 and 1800. The documents tell us that the landowner was the Earl Fitzwilliam and the occupier was George Brooke. The Brooke family would occupy the farm from the latter part of the 18th century (I don't know the exact date) through to around 1930. Having managed to find all the census documents from 1841 to 1911 and the 1939 register it's clear that many individuals particularly in the Brooke family were born and died at Old Moor Farm/House. I'm almost certain that Joseph Brooke born in 1857 was the last Brooke to reside at Old Moor. The 1927 trade directory shows him as the farmer here. I've still not managed to find a death entry for Joseph but the 1939 Register tells us that the occupants were Stanley Gascoyne, dairy farmer with his wife Ethel and son Brian.

Several people who currently work at Old Moor remember the Gascoyne family from the early years of Old Moor Wetland Centre.

There is still a lot of information to gather and a lot of documents to be uncovered. I'm going to try to fill in as many gaps as I can in the future. If anyone suspects that I got some incorrect information then please feel free to correct me. There is so much more to Old Moor than meets the eye. It will take time.

In the not too distant future I am surveying and photographing the carvings dotted about the walls and buildings. Hopefully I will get them all but if anyone has inside information of hidden ones then please let me know. The carvings suggest to me that the farm housed some very talented people in the past. Logging the carvings will be a fine tribute to him, her or them. Maybe one day whilst digging in the archives I will come across an actual name.

I hope these few notes of the initial findings will intrigue people. Historical research can be addictive. You find one answer but that asks you two more questions. Hopefully the maps and other documents will be made available to view in time for the Heritage Event on 19th June . Anyone requiring copies is welcome to contact me.

Alvin Hickling