

## **9. Cultural Information**

### 9.1 Archaeology

The meadows that today form the land around Merecroft Pool were once part of two large granges that formed the medieval estate belonging to Bordesley Abbey. During this period the land was known as Kingsack Farm and was cultivated as “closes”. The ridge and furrows noted on land adjoining the pool are unlikely to be the result of medieval open-field cultivation but more probably the result of 19th century ploughing.

Records show that a watermill stood on the Reservoir site from as early as 1638. Remains of later mill structures are still visible along the eastern boundary of the reservoir site. These remains are listed as site no. 03201 on the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record.

By the early 19th Century a rolling-mill stood on the site. This mill was powered by water drawn through a mill race. The mill race ran from Popes Lane, where water was taken from the river via a sluice, along the northern boundary of the reservoir and into the mill complex. This once stood on what is today the south western corner of Catesby Business Park. The mill stream then continued along the northern edge of the Recreation Ground towards Westhill Road following the line of the drainage ditch which runs along the northern boundary.

### 9.2 Past Land Management

Prior to the enclosure period of the 18th Century the entire area surrounding the LNR was low-lying wet meadow which would have been used as grazing land for livestock.

In 1774 an Enclosure Award was granted to an area of land which today includes the meadows that surround Merecroft.

The first records of specific ownership of Merecroft appear in 1844 when the Tithe Map and associated Appointment Documents were issued. These documents name Mr. Robert Edward Eden Mynors as the owner of an area known as Long Meadow which encompassed what is today Merecroft. The land was managed and farmed by Mr. John Phillips at New House Farm which stood on what is today Kingshill Drive.

The Recreation Ground by 1884 was managed as farmland comprising fields marked out by hedgerows. During the 1960's this area passed into the ownership of Birmingham City Council and has been managed as Public Open Space (POS) ever since.

Wychall Reservoir was originally constructed as a canal compensation reservoir by the Worcester Canal Company in the early 19th century. At this time the reservoir covered 6.72 hectares. By 1884 the build up of sediment and the process of secondary succession had resulted in the lost of approx. 1 hectare of surface area.

By 1904 another hectare had been lost and a further hectare lost by 1936. Birmingham City Council took ownership of the reservoir site during the early 1960's and managed the site as a Public Open Space.

The surface area of the reservoir currently covers less than 10% of its original size. This loss reflects a decline in management for water retention initiated by the decreasing use of the canal network as a means of transportation as well as the deliberate piercing of the dam by British Waterways.

The Peafield Site in 1884 comprised two fields belonging to Wychall Farm. This farm was on the site now occupied by St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School. By 1904 the northern half had become a nursery while the southern half remained as farmland. Birmingham City Council took ownership of the site in 1964 at which time the northern half was converted into public allotments. These allotments remained in use until the 1980s when the land was turned over to the Parks Department and managed as a Public Open Space.

### 9.3 Present Land Management

As part of the LNR designation process a management plan was developed. This management plan outlined a number of projects which would allow the LNR to develop as an area for conservation and education.

Birmingham's Parks and Nature Conservation are responsible for the LNR with the Ranger Service providing on-site support.

In 2004 the FKNLNR was set up in order to provide a means for land management to take place outside of the provision from Birmingham City Council.

Engaging with the local community they carry out a wide range of practical conservation and promotional tasks. These tasks have allowed the site to develop along the themes set out within the original management plan and as a result the LNR has a strong identity within the local and wider Birmingham area.

### 9.4 Past Site Status

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1982 | Wychall Reservoir designated as a Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC).   |
| 1989 | Merecroft southern meadows, pool and dam designated as a SINC.                        |
| 1989 | Wychall Reservoir and Merecroft identified as potential Local Nature Reserves (pLNR). |
| 2016 | Peafields included in Kings Norton LNR.   |

## 9.5 Present Site Status

The designation of Kings Norton LNR took place in October 2005 and brought together Merecroft, the Recreation Ground and Wychall Reservoir into one unit. In 2016 the Peafields site was included in the LNR.

## 9.6 Public Use and Interest

### 9.6.1 General Site Use

The activities that take place across the LNR include bird-watching, cycling, dog walking, football, jogging and general recreation.

### 9.6.2 Local Community

In 1999 the Friends of Wychall Reservoir (FWR) were set up to represent the interests of local stakeholders. In 2004 the FWR expanded to consider wider issues within the local area. Joining with other local stake holders resulted in the formation of the FKNLNR.

As well as carrying out the vital conservation tasks required on site, the FKNLNR aim to raise the profile of the LNR locally and regionally. They hold an annual open day within the LNR. They also have guided walks three times a year for local people.

### 9.6.3 Education

The site has been used on an occasional basis for education. In the summer of 2002 an educational officer from the Natural Curriculum Project (A Wildlife Trust Project) used the site to carry out a project with groups of local school children and their parents. Since then the LNR has been used by the City Councils Environmental Warden Scheme and the Northfield Ranger as an educational facility.