

**YOUNGWOOD LANE, NAILSEA**  
AN HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

**BY MARGARET THOMAS**



Coombe Grange

Previously published June 1996 by Nailsea & District Local History Society.

This ebook version, © Margaret Thomas and Nailsea & District Local History Society, PO Box 1089, Nailsea BS48 2YP, has been made available in January 2005, so that an individual may download and read this document, for private research purposes only. It must not be reproduced or passed to a third party without written permission of the copyright holders.

## YOUNGWOOD LANE - NAILSEA

---

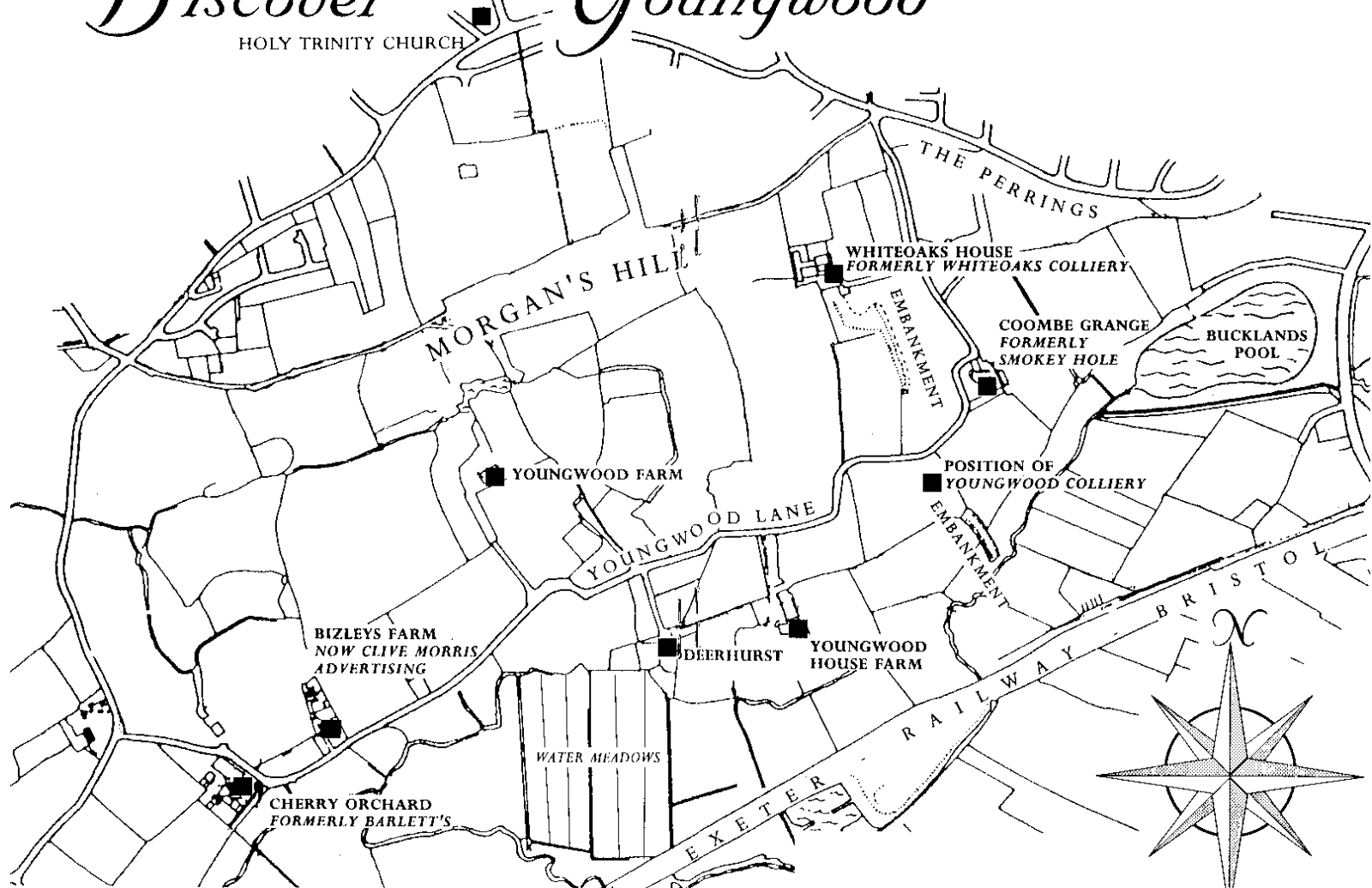
### **AN HISTORIC LANDSCAPE - WELL WORTH EXPLORATION**

**Y**oungwood Lane remains one of the most unspoilt historical landscapes in Nailsea. Lying in an isolated position on the southern fringe of the parish, close to the Backwell boundary, few people were aware of its existence until, in 1989 it was threatened by developers who wished to build a new village along the valley between Nailsea and Backwell.

Considerable local protest over a protracted period, led by the Morgan's Hill Protection Society, aided by the Council for the Protection of Rural England, eventually led to the failure of the development plans, since the developers failed to get the land zoned for housing in the Local Draft Plan. However, because of the threat a new look has been taken at the Youngwood Lane area, which has led to a heightened awareness of its importance.

Youngwood Lane remains essentially an agricultural landscape: a palimpsest of many centuries of farming.

# Discover Youngwood



Map drawn by Mark Hornby

In the medieval period much of the area to the North of the lane was included in one of the large, commonly owned, open fields of Nailsea. This was the area where the arable crops were grown. These large open fields were divided into sizeable strips, some tenants holding just one strip while others held many more. Because of the restricted space within a strip, and, in order to aid drainage, the strips were ploughed in the same direction each year. The primitive plough of the period pushed the soil to one side only, this ensuring, over a period of years, that a ridge formed, sometimes growing several feet in height. The late Mr Pullan argued that traces of 'ridge and furrow' could be identified around Youngwood House Farm, but it is also possible that later attempts at drainage could have produced the same features in the landscape.

Over the centuries, strips were enclosed or combined together piecemeal, the resulting field boundaries following the outline of some of the strips. This can clearly be seen in the earliest maps of the area dating from the late 1830s.

While the pasture land lay to the North and West of Nailsea (*on Nailsea Heath and Nailsea Moor*) the Youngwood Lane area provided the hay meadows for the parish. The less well drained meadows bordering the River Kenn were used to grow grass which, converted to hay, provided the only winter feed available at the time. Few animals, apart from those required for breeding, were kept through the winter because of the shortage of winter feed. Hay meadows were therefore an important component of the agricultural economy.

The communal aspect of agriculture which characterised much of the mediaeval economy, gradually disappeared by the beginning of the nineteenth century leaving in common ownership, apart from the aforesaid moors and heath, only a few small patches of the former arable fields and hay meadows.

One area of the former hay meadows was converted into water meadows, probably in the seventeenth century. Water Meadows were a revolutionary attempt to produce young grass very early in the year, a critical necessity when winter feed was in such short supply. To provide the grass, the meadows were flooded and a complicated series of leats implemented which ensured a constant supply of running water spilling over the fields, thus preventing frost.

As the strips of the open fields were combined and enclosed, a transformation of the landscape took place.

Instead of huge unbroken fields, compact fields surrounded by hedges or stone walls were created. These in turn became nucleated around individual farmsteads and the landscape of Youngwood Lane as we know it today emerged.

It is uncertain precisely when this reorganisation took place, probably over a long period of time, but since most of the surviving buildings seem to have originated in the sixteenth century, this would appear to be the most likely date. The landscape, therefore, which evolved in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is the one that survives today: A landscape of old farmhouses, surrounded by a network of compact fields demarcated by hedgerows or stone walls. It is a pastoral landscape; grazing replacing arable, once adequate supplies of grain could be obtained from other areas more suited to arable production.

The farmhouses survive as interesting examples of vernacular architecture. Three of the six are listed buildings.

As far as can be ascertained from external features, part of Coombe Grange, formerly Smokey Hole, is the oldest of the surviving farmhouses along Youngwood Lane. The original farm house consisted of the frontage facing the road, which may have been a long house, divided by a cross passage; the

family inhabited one end and the animals the other. In the early nineteenth century a wing with a symmetrical facade was tacked onto the back of the house, thus creating a double stack house.

Youngwood House Farm and neighbouring Deerhurst both date from the 1600's. The former retained, for many years, its cider house and press, cider playing an important part in an agricultural economy.

Youngwood Farm, a confusing juxta-positioning of names, has a late eighteenth century facade but most certainly stands on the site of an earlier house.

Bizley, further along the lane has the appearance of a typical Victorian farmhouse, but again this is little more than skin deep and restoration work revealed that the Victorian frontage disguised a much earlier cross passage house.

The last of the six farms along Youngwood Lane was Barlett's, now Cherry Orchard, which has been so altered and rebuilt over the years that little of interest survives externally, apart from the farm buildings.

The tranquillity of the agricultural scene was transformed in the middle of the nineteenth century by the opening of two coal pits in the area. The collieries were powered by steam engines whose resultant pollution earned the area the name 'Smokey Hole'. The two coal pits were Youngwood, at the bottom of the hill, and White Oak, at the top. Although coal mining had been a feature of the Nailsea landscape since the sixteenth century the two Youngwood pits were relatively late comers to the scene – Youngwood opened in the mid 1840s and Whiteoak a year or so later. The Nailsea coalfield is in general poorly documented, but some evidence survives for this area since the two pits were part of the company of

White and Co who operated the largest coalmining consortium in Nailsea.

In 1848, White and Co's 'Valuation of Plan' (ie machinery), included Youngwood Pit:

*Pumping Engine Closed top 44" 8' stroke*

*Winding engine, High Pressure 15"*

*Two boilers, stack 13' diameter*

The Youngwood workings extended well beyond the parish boundary, under land belonging to the Marquess of Bath in Backwell. Youngwood Pit closed in 1867. Whiteoak was in operation by 1846 and was one of the last to close in the 1880s. Rules governing the operation of the pit survive and outline, in some detail, the safety measures in force just before its closure.

Expansion of the Nailsea coalfield was hampered by lack of good communications and transport. The arrival of the railway in the 1840s partially solved the problem, although it had little effect on the development of Nailsea as a whole. Bulky cargoes such as coal, could be carried quickly and cheaply.

Tramways were built from the collieries to link up with the main line, where a coal siding was built. A planned tramway linking Double Screen Pit on Station Road with the main line never transpired but one linking the main line with Youngwood and Whiteoak was completed. A sizeable embankment carried the tramway down the hill to Youngwood and then crossed the River Kenn on a viaduct. Grace's pit at West End also had a tramway link which ran in a huge curve down the hill from where Engine Lane now joins St Marys Grove to Bizley Farm and then parallel with Youngwood Lane to the coal sidings.



After the closure of the mines, the colliery buildings at Whiteoak were converted into outbuildings, but only a few footings remain of the buildings at Youngwood. Sizeable remnants of the embankment survive shrouded in bushes. These together with a few cinder-capped stone walls, are all that remain today to indicate the area's important industrial past.

Historic landscapes are often rich in wildlife and Youngwood Lane is no exception. The Nailsea branch of the Avon Wildlife Trust manages Netcotts Field, close to the junction of The Perrings and Youngwood Lane.

At Coombe Grange, agricultural techniques have changed little over the past fifty years, resulting in a range of flowers and fauna unequalled on more up to date farms where pesticides and such like are in use. Evidence of this lies in the magnificent daffodil fields behind the house which provides a spectacular display in springtime. This network of fields between Coombe Grange and Bucklands Pool has been designated as a "site of County Wildlife Conservation Importance" since it is "a remnant of unimproved natural grassland which contains species now getting rare due to changing agricultural practices". Part of Bucklands Pool and Morgans Hill are also so designated.

Youngwood Lane is narrow, closed in with high hedgerows and stone walls. Walking can be dangerous but it is linked to the surrounding area by a network of footpaths. Care needs to be taken but it is an historic landscape well worth exploration!