

Westfield Common

Winchester College, Hamble's Lord of the Manor, owned Westfield Common and it was tithe number 185 until it was sold at the end of 1929. Westfield Common is just over eight acres in area. Traditional Common rights allowed, with certain restrictions, village commoners' livestock to graze upon it, to collect firewood, or to cut turf for fuel. Hamble's coastal location also gave the right to collect seaweed from the shore to fertilize their fields.

For many centuries a natural water source at Westfield Common was used to supply vessels anchored offshore. Vessels anchored off Netley Roads filled their fresh water casks and it was also used by Southampton Pilot Ketches.

This spring was made into a well, known as Caddick Well. It was once regarded as a 'holy well' and bottles of this water was sent as far afield as Surrey for its holy or medicinal quality. Caddick Well used to bear the inscription 'Let him that thirsteth drink this water' on its surrounding stonework which was erected by the Yorke family. Today water can still be seen running across the beach at its location from this water source.

On Westfield Common was a saluting battery built by Captain Yorke to salute ships arriving in the Roads off his Sydney Lodge estate. It contained six cannons he brought home from a Dutch frigate, the 'Alliance', which he had captured in 1805. Captain Yorke was drowned in 1831. A tablet was set in the parapet in his memory by his son the fourth Earl Hardwicke in 1871. It was kept in good repair until the late 1920s when the estate was sold and the guns were taken to the family seat in Gloucester. Some remains of its base can still be seen in the undergrowth.

In 1924 the Yorke family erected a gate across Coach Road which led to Westfield Common but the Rural District Council had it removed.

Sydney Lodge and its estate was sold in 1929 to Major Charles Goldman, a South African businessman. He also bought from Winchester College, Westfield Common for £1,500. He then fenced in the Common and put a gate across Coach Road at the entrance to the Common. Permission to go on the Common was obtainable from Sydney Lodge, but no parishioners went there to ask permission to go on it. This led to parishioners' resentment and the gate was removed several times.

The climax arrived when a new gate appeared, chained and padlocked. One dark and rainy night a gang, women & all, again visited the spot. Joe Lockyer's hacksaw blade went through that chain as though it was butter. The gate a heavy one, was placed in the ditch. After that, when the gate was replaced a custodian stood by, with frequently a policeman in attendance.

Subsequently, a parishioner confronted the custodian and the policeman seeking to go through the gate without permission, which he achieved successfully. The gate was then left unlocked and unattended as it was obvious that there was no inclination to go to court over this matter.

British Marine Aircraft purchased the Sydney Lodge Estate and Hamble Cliff House in 1936 to build a new aircraft factory to manufacture flying boats.

At the end of 1937, Folland Aircraft took over the factory and subsequently it became part of the Hawker Siddeley group, hence they owned the factory and Westfield Common.

During the Second World War a Pill-Box was built on Westfield Common and it was fenced off with barbed wire to keep people away from the gun emplacements.

Folland Aircraft also endeavoured to enclose part of Westfield Common for factory expansion, it said the rights were for copyholders not the public. After the war a Ministry Inquiry rejected the proposal.

Over the years a boathouse and hard, later replaced by a concrete slipway, was situated on Westfield Common's water's edge. The slipway still remains today but the last boathouse used by the aircraft company's social club was demolished in 1982.

In 1962 a public convenience was provided by the Rural District Council just inside the entrance to Westfield Common, but due to continual vandalism had to be removed in 1982.

Eastleigh Borough Council bought Westfield Common from Hawker Siddeley in 1979.

In 1982 the Pill-Box was blocked up as it was a health hazard and a project to encourage bats to use it was later undertaken.

In 2010 Eastleigh Borough Council transferred Westfield Common to Hamble Parish Council, its current owner. In 2003, the Parish Council purchased the foreshore between the high and low water marks off Westfield Common, with money gained as result of a settlement after a Public Inquiry regarding another foreshore in the Parish.

The foreshore is used for beach fishing and during the day mainly Flounder, Plaice and Eels can be caught, with the occasional Bass and Mullet. Pout and Sole are also caught usually during night fishing. In June and July Smoothhound provide good fishing.

Southampton Water is internationally important for its wading birds, as shown by its SPA (Special Protection Area) designation. Many species can be seen such as oystercatchers, turnstones and ringed plovers.

Over the centuries vessels using Southampton Water have been viewed from Westfield Common. This includes the early Venetian galleys, Brunel's 'Great Eastern' and the great Trans-Atlantic liners of the mid 20th century. Today all types of shipping using the Port of Southampton can be seen.

The woodland has a canopy of oak, beech and sycamore, with lower down elm, holm oak, turkey oak and holly. At ground level meadow grass, bracken, gorse, butcher's broom and bluebells. The Parish Council manages Westfield Common today for everyone to enjoy.