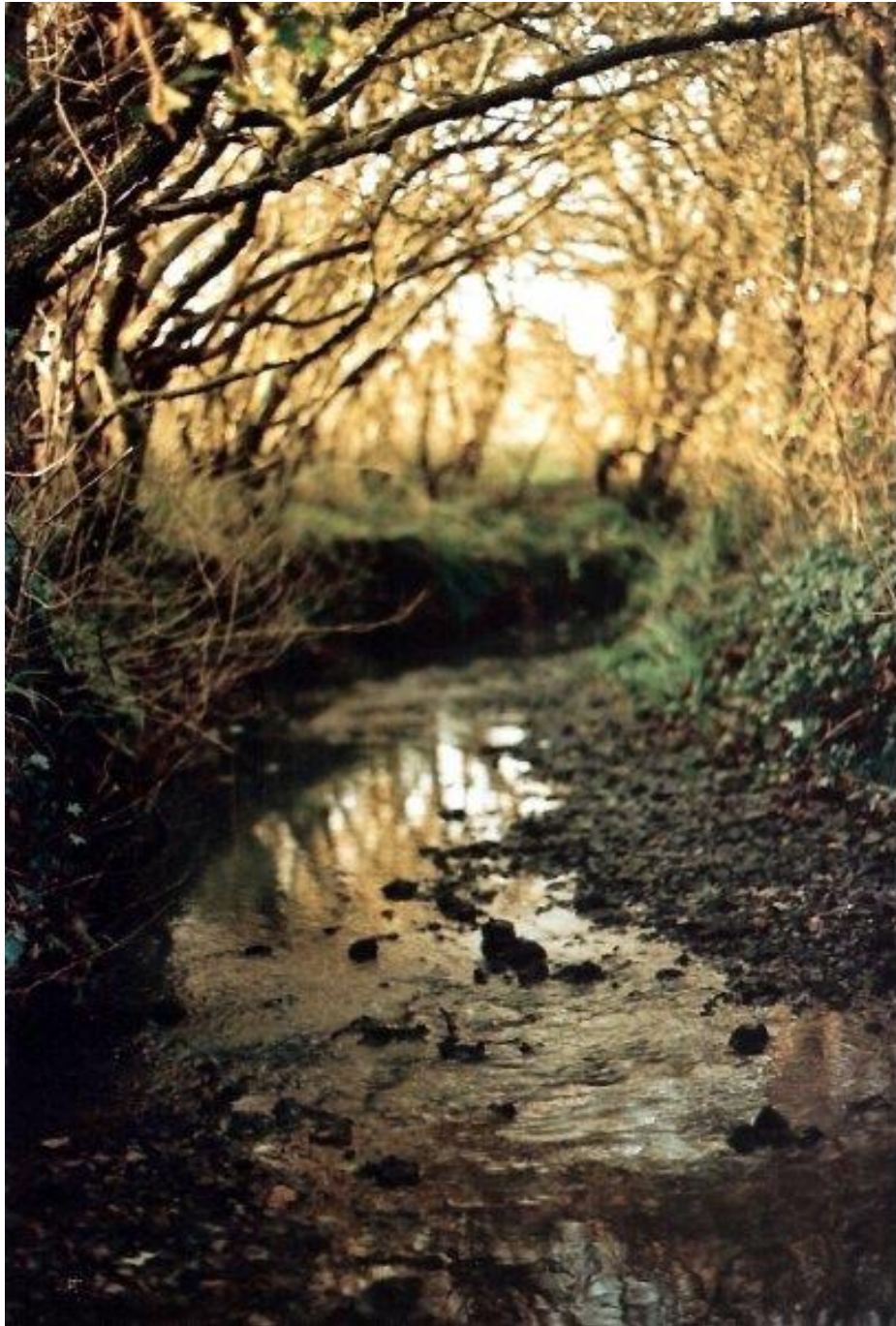


**A Journey down the Rodge Brook**  
**through the Ages**



by Carole Jewett

Dedicated to my family and friends.

**Acknowledgements:**

Front cover: Jonathan Jewett

Back Cover: Map, Isle of Wight County Record Office,

Old deed of sale of Rodgebrook Farm Isle of Wight

County Record Office.

## **Chapter 1: We arrive**

We first saw the Rodge Brook some 31 years ago. It was our first visit to Rodgebrook Farm with a view to buying. The date was Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 1987, a good omen for me as it was my Grandmothers 99<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The weather that year was drizzly and cold, and the stream was full to the brim, but not just with water but black, teeming with eels. They were observed climbing the bank making their way across Porchfield Cricket field to a pond near Coleman's farm. A possible ancient spawning ground?

Sadly, eels have not been seen by us in many years. I have also heard that red mullet was once found in the stream in Porchfield village but that could be an urban myth.

For those of you who do not know, the Rodge Brook rises in Parkhurst Forest winding its way down through farm land, runs under Whitehouse Road and is joined by a tributary that divides the lands of Vittlefields Farm and Colemans Farm. It then flows through more farm land, running behind the houses in New Road (known previously as Dirty Lane) and out through an arm of Clamerkin Lake to the Solent.

Indicators of ancient woodland can be found along its banks: butcher's broom and spindleberry (from which the word 'spinster' is derived). From the wood of the Spindleberry was made the spindles for spinning yarn, and the person, usually a young unmarried girl, doing the spinning was known as a spinster).

Other indicators of woodland age include Bluebells, primroses, and orchids, hawthorn, blackthorn, some very fine oaks and once, not too long-ago, beautiful Elms.

We have some 40 species of birds that visit our garden at Rodgebrook Farm. These have included two varieties of woodpeckers, redwings, field fares, long tail tits and occasional firecrests. Swallows regularly nest in the stables; a barn owl is a frequent visitor as is a little owl. Sometimes a heron can be spotted waiting patiently by the brook, perhaps having remembered the eels. Ducks and Moorhens nest on the old dew pond. Sadly, the song of the nightingale in the far copse has not been heard for some years.

There have been hares cavorting in the front fields and in recent years rabbits have crossed the road to take up residence. Occasionally there is a red squirrel. They all benefit from the seclusion and protection of the area around the Rodge Brook.

The brook has been known to flood to 80-foot-wide in places after a very heavy winter rainfall, then will dry into muddy pools in hot summers. Such are the vagaries of the Rodge Brook.

## **Chapter 2: The area in the late 1800's**

Local people may be familiar with the memoirs of Edwin Holbrook a long-time resident of Porchfield. He was 81 in 1954 when he wrote his memoirs, remembering the people, the village and area of his youth. He mentions "old Moses Scovell" farming at Whitehouse Farm, which dates his memories to pre-1890.

Whitehouse Farm along with Little Whitehouse Farm, Rodgebrook Farm and Little Rodgebrook Farm were all sold at auction in 1892. The Isle of Wight County Press 1892 advertised ...

*"Important sale of four freehold Dairy Farms, cottages and land situate in the parish of Northwood, comprising the Whitehouse Estate. By instructions received from the executors under the will of the late Mr. William Scovell to sell by auction, in lots, at the Bugle Hotel, Newport, on Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1892" ...*

While we are all used to having fresh water on tap, we can easily forget that in years gone by fresh water was dependant on the weather. Mr Holbrook tells us how.....

*" In my early childhood, the only water supply in the village was from the brook running through the village and the ponds dug in the fields for the cattle to drink. All water used for domestic purposes was boiled first. There were a number of cases of diphtheria in the neighbourhood, and the medical officer, the late Dr Groves of Carisbrooke, reported that it was caused by drinking contaminated water. The Local Government Authority ordered that a rain-water tank should be dug for each house that had no supply" .....*

Presumably some households drew their water from wells. At Rodgebrook Farm there were two wells.

Mr. Holbrook goes on to say,

*“This was an improvement, but it was very unsatisfactory, as after the rains the water from the roof tasted very smoky (due to most roofs being made of thatch) and it was not fit to drink until it had time to settle. This went on for several years. In 1905 pipes were laid from Calbourne where there was a lovely supply of spring water. Since that time, we have had one of the best supplies in the Island”.*

84 years were to pass before main drainage came to Porchfield Village in 1989.

### **Chapter 3: The area altered by Act of Parliament:**

Some 75 years before Edwin Holbrook's reminiscences the area and its farming was to be altered by an 1812 Act of Parliament entitled: *"An Act for disafforesting the Forest of Parkhurst, in the County of Southampton, and for enclosing the Open Commonable Lands within the said Forest"*.

Many of the farms that surround the Parkhurst Forest are approached by long tracks. The reason is that until 1812 the forest stretched to their very front doors.

A map that accompanies a 1770 survey of the forest by the Surveyor General clearly shows the extent of the forest. At that date it was about 3,043 acres and stocked with 200 deer of various sorts. The farms all held commoners' rights within the forest; very much like the New Forest today. The residents of Newport also had Rights of Common to allow them to the annual collection of furze as fuel for their fires. Others with rights of common included:

- The Corporation of the Town of Newport,
- Provost and Fellows of Queen's College, Oxford,
- Clerks of the College of Winchester,
- the Manor of Alvington,
- the Manor of Carisbrooke,
- the dissolved Priory of Carisbrooke,
- and many others.

Even the King held Rights of Common through his ownership of ...*"farm and lands belonging to His Majesty in right of his crown, called Park Farm"*...

The Act goes on to state:

*..." And whereas the said Forest was heretofore of great value and utility from the Timber and Underwood thereon, which of*

*late years have been very injured, and in most places totally destroyed; and the soil thereof, in its present uncultivated state, is but of small value to his Majesty and the Public but is capable of considerable improvement” ...*

I'm not sure that the locals would have agreed with the previous paragraph. They had enjoyed roaming within the Forest and most of the tracks that lead to Carisbrooke, Newport, and Cowes went through the Forest. Interestingly there was a move to rescind the Act in 1905 to return the common rights after the Forestry Commission barred the public from entering the Forest, but this came to nothing.

However, there was a shining light for the farms with Rights of Common. Large areas of the forest were cleared, and fields were allotted in exchange for their Rights of Common. Those fields were numbered with the names of their owners listed. The record of this, including a map is kept at the County Record Office in Newport.

Some of the allotments along the eastern side of the Forest were auctioned off for homes and gardens but the southern and western sides have remained almost intact.

Out of the Act also came new roads to replace the ancient track ways:

- Forest Road from Gunville Gate through to Vittlefields Gate to be 36-foot-wide;
- Park Gate through to Whitehouse Gate (now Betty Haunt Lane and Whitehouse Road); and
- Coleman's Corner through to Lock's Farm, now Coleman's Lane, then the main Highway from Newtown to Newport - both to be 30 foot wide.



Each allotment of land reads,

*".... and we do award order and direct that the hedges, ditches, mounds, and fences parts of the same allotment shall be made and forever maintained and kept in repair by the owner occupier for the time being, of the same allotment." ....*

The residue of Commoners Rights for the remainder of the Isle of Wight freeholders were entrusted to the House of Industry for the Island Poor. Inmates were used to clear the land to create a nursery to grow the blackthorn and hawthorn needed for the new hedges that would border the fields. Forest Farm was used as a base for the workers. There remains the bread oven on the side of the house used for baking the bread to feed the workers.

A deed of 1<sup>st</sup> June 1815 of Rodgebrook Farm sets out their allocated allotment:

*"..... and also, all that piece of land containing 5 acres or thereabouts lately allotted to and laid to the said farm under the Act of Parliament for dividing and enclosing the common and wastelands of the forest of Parkhurst in the said Isle of Wight...."*

It goes on to say that:

*..." will at his and their own proper costs and charges fence in and inclose the said allotment containing 5 acres or thereabouts" ....*

So, the landscape described by Edwin Holbrook, including Sandhills and Hillcross Farms, was quite new and created by an Act of Parliament.

## **Chapter 4: The Ancient Landscape**

There still exists evidence of a more ancient landscape in which the Rodgebrook features prominently. You just have to know where to look.

An Anglo-Saxon document provides the first known written evidence of this area. King Edgar confirmed the lands of the Nuns of Wilton in 968 A.D. These consisted of 360 acres of the Manor of Watchingwell of 360 acres, the boundary being the stream ...*HRECESCUMBE HEAFDE*... which divided the parishes of Watchingwell and Carisbrooke. (King Edgar's sister was the Abbess to the nuns at Wilton.) The stream is the Rodge Brook which is believed to come from Old English .... *raece and broc*.... meaning "the brook of the hunting dogs".

In the Domesday Book of 1084 the lands of the St. Mary of Wilton Abbey are reaffirmed as,

*"... Wilton Abbey holds Watchingwell. It was always in the Monastery. Before 1066 it answered for 3 hides, now for 2 ½ hides, because half is in the King's park.... The King's park .... the later Royal Forest of Parkhurst lay to the east of this manor...."*

The next mention of Rodge Brook is in a deed of about 1290 which is now held in the British Museum. In that deed Isabella de Fortibus, Countess of Albermarle and Devon and Lady of the Isle of Wight granted to Walter, son of Richard Norman,

*"5 acres in the culture called Kyteton, next to the land of Priory of St Cross, rent 1lb of wax in exchange for all his land of Rachebrook which is called The Yengewoode of the fee of Henry Trenchard, which he had of the gift of Amice, mother of Isabella."*

At this time the lands of Rodgebrook and Youngwood's stretched from the forest to the sea taking in what is now the village of Porchfield and was probably most of the detached portion of Shalfleet Parish.

*.... Among the liberties that the Countess claimed and allowed to her by the itinerant Justices, in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Edward I, is that of a free chase in the Forest....*

Walter Norman was Reeve to Isabella de Fortibus. A reeve was the Chief Officer under the King of a town or district or overseer of a Manor, steward, and Bailiff. He obviously travelled with Isabella because there is a note in the records that he paid 50 shillings for the expenses of the Countess while she was in London at Easter 1270.

Henry Trenchard of the Manor of Shalfleet is listed in another note as being a Parson of Shalfleet and along with Jordan de Kingston purchased nine dozen lamprey eels (a delicacy of the time of which it is believed King Henry I died from a surfeit of.) for the Countess at 4/- a dozen. Incredibly expensive.

In 1402 a direct descendant of Walter Norman, Ralf known as Le Eyr left to his grandson Nicholas Erlesman all his lands, no mention that the acreage might have dwindled. But dwindled it had because in 1327 John Le Port (from whom Porchfield was named) and his wife Alice granted to Thomas Fockerby: 1 Messuage and 1 carucate of land in Watchingwell and Rochebrok.

Later that same year Thomas granted the same plus 2 acres of meadow and 16 acres of pasture in Watchingwell to John de Accombe and his wife.

By 1630 John Bull granted the same lands to George Searle, gentleman and Cicely his wife 1 messuage 70 acres of pasture in Shalfleet (called Porchfield).

In 1427 Nicholas Erlesman grants all his lands to John Tredyngton with a remainder that if John should die without heirs of the body then the said lands revert to Thomas Roucle, another descendant of Walter Norman.

During the early reign of Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> the country was already in fear of invasion from the Spanish. The Island was thought to be the first landfall from such an invasion hence it was imperative that those absentee landlords whiling away their time in London should return to the island and make good its defences. One such Lord was Sir John Trenchard of Shalfleet. He did not return until he was threatened with the loss of all his lands. So, in 1559 the Queen ordered a survey of all lands in her kingdom. The purpose of this survey unlike the Domesday Survey was not to evaluate a kingdom but name the landowners and their holdings to make them responsible for the defence of the realm.

In 1559 the Rookley lands had dwindled down to

*.... George Rookley holds a void ground called Rodge Brookes of his own land of 14 acres and common in the forest for as many bestes and shep as he may keep upon the same ground with no rent but to, the Jeister of the Forest 2/6....*

The Rookley Family eventually sold this land in 1669 after the death of James Rookley, the family had held the lands for 379 years.

In Sir John Oglanders "Common Book" of 1620 he writes,

*".... A noate of ye Gentlemen and Knights that have beene of late days inhabitants of ye Isle of Wight .... At Clatterforde liveth one James Rookley, a member of that awntient howse, this man hath lived theyre, and his awncestors inoyed that small thinge he is nowe theyre possessed of ever since Edward ye fyrsts*

*reygne, as may appeare by a deede from Isabella de Fortibus to his awncestor...”*

Through out these centuries hunting was a major pastime of the King and his lords. The deer were a precious commodity, not only for hunting but as food and their hides used for leather. Henry VIII when hunting in Parkhurst bagged a very large buck which he then presented to the Lady of the Manor of Brook. The deer needed to be managed and protected from poachers, in fact they were basically farmed. In turn hunting dogs needed to be kennelled and looked after.

Surrounding the forest lies all the evidence of this ancient landscape stretching back centuries.

- Alvington Manor Farm in the South,
- Great Park Farm in the southwest corner,
- Park Place, New Park, Vittlefields Farm, Coleman’s Farm, Rodgebrook Farm, and Youngwood’s in the west, and
- Whitehouse Farm at the north-west corner.

These farms were the messuages and lands that encompassed the ancient forest. The tracks and highways that connected them to each other and to the castle at Carisbrooke, remain as public footpaths today. The derivation of their names gives the biggest clue to the history of the area as the roots of most of the names are found in Old English words.

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- Alvington Manor Farm: Probably the farmstead or estate belonging to AELFWYNN;
- Great Park, Park Place and New Park: named from the medieval park or forest which at that time extended from the river Medina in the East to Newtown in the West – a much larger area than the present Parkhurst Forest, (in old English “park”

was an enclosed tract of land set apart for the breeding and hunting of wild animals);

- Vittlefields Farm: The second element is O.E. feld “open land”, the first is uncertain could be open field where fiddle is played as in merry making. This was an early enclosure from the open fields.
- Coleman’s Farm: earlier spelling Kalman – where deer were kept.
- Rodgebrook Farm: named from the stream which runs through the property dividing it between Carisbrooke and the old parish of Watchingwell.
- Rodge Brook: race broc O.E. “the brook of the hunting dogs”.
- Whitehouse Farm: in old deeds of 1701 was known as Heathy Hills, which describes the surrounding land.
- Youngwood’s: self-explanatory was so called 1260.
- Parkhurst Forest: “The wooded hill in the hunting park” from O.E. hyrst with Middle English park “an enclosed tract of land for hunting, a chase”.
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There are three further features of this area which are worthy of note. They are Betty Haunt Lane, Coleman’s Common, and Dog’s Ant. Today “Betty Haunt Lane” stretches from the Carisbrooke/Calbourne Road in the south to its junction with Forest Road at Vittlefields Cross at its northern end. Because of its proximity to the Blacksmith’s Arms and that delightful taverns association with smuggling, romantic notions are perpetuated concerning Betty haunting the area. However, a Haunt as described by Webster’s Dictionary comes from M.E. haunten or hauten... a lair or feeding place of animals... also hant as in Hants, Hampshire. It has been suggested that “Betty” is a contraction of “between” as the site of the lane at its southern end was the boundary between Carisbrooke Parish and Watchingwell.

At the northern end of Parkhurst Forest, between Whitehouse Farm and Mark’s Corner is “Dog’s Ant” The lodge to the forest was nearby.

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century there were several “pug” houses at Dog’s Ant, the walls were of clay and were reputed to be eight feet thick in parts, which required a considerable amount of force when they were finally knocked down. “Dog’s Ant” as with the previous explanation for “Betty Haunt” could have been where the hunting dogs were kennelled.

Midway between Betty Haunt and Dogs Ant runs the Rodge Brook (the brook of the hunting dogs) and at the end of Rodgebrook Farm land is Colemans Common. Colemans Common is a funnel shaped parcel of land of 16 acres. It has been suggested that it is a typical stock funnel, that would have been used to herd female animals when in calf to keep them penned safely until the calves were born.

So, this is the evidence of the ancient landscape, Parkhurst Forest was a royal chase and had been for many centuries stocked with deer. Dog’s Ant was where the hunting dogs were kept, Betty Haunt was where the deer were fed, the Rodge Brook where the hunting dogs were watered, and Coleman’s Common was where the pregnant deer were kept.

I hope you feel like me that this small area of the Island is of great historical importance and worthy of our conservation.



The

One Indenture dated the seven<sup>th</sup> of  
 Anno Dni 1669 made between James Rookes  
 and Richard Holbrook of the one part and Parcell Dun  
 the other part with a partitionment Bond for performants of  
 Covenant<sup>s</sup>.

¶ An Indenture (on paper) dated the four and Twentieth day of  
 July Anno Dni 1697 made between Liard Hoquet Spinster  
 of the one part and Richard Hoquet Gent of the other part.

¶ One Indenture dated the Nineteenth day of September Anno  
 Dni 1699 made between Richard Hoquet Gent of the one part  
 and Timothy Eust<sup>is</sup> Gent of the other part.

Richard + Young  
 his Marks.