

Statement of Ken Taylor

Qualification and experience

I have lived in Brislington for more than three decades. I was a freelance reporter on local events for Bristol newspapers for seven years in the 1990s and since then have written extensively on local history subjects. I am a founder member and subsequently Chair of Brislington Community Archaeology Project before stepping down to focus on writing a book about Brislington's royal medieval pilgrimage site of the Chapel of St Anne in the Wood and the nearby holy well (published by Archyve, 2014). I have written eight and contributed to ten other local, national and international books on ancient traditions with modern relevance, one of my most recent solo publications being a global round-up of archaeological sites with astronomical alignments (which has been translated into French and German editions). I am currently Chair of Brislington Community Museum.

Statement

1. Brislington appears always to have been a popular place to live. Old Stone Age tools have been found nearby on either side of Brislington Meadows - to the west at St Anne's and to the east by Ironmould Lane (CD11.4 (a)). New Stone Age tools have been found in these meadows themselves, and archaeologists working for Homes England have dated a variety of structures and artefacts at the site as being Roman (some predating Brislington Villa) (CD1.18 b)). In view of the Saxon origin of the name Brislington, it seems reasonable to assume there have been millennia of continuous occupation in this area, with the meadows playing an active role throughout.
2. The Archaeological Survey issued by Homes England (CD1.18 b)) incorporates best practice by excavating only small parts of the features it unearthed. This is in recognition of the two key facts – firstly, that new techniques for extracting data will be developed in the future, and secondly, that archaeological excavation is a destructive process that curtails the use of any further innovation. This is why most sites are allowed to remain safely untouched in the ground that has preserved them so far.
3. The limited excavations carried out have found good evidence of Roman glass-working in an enclosure in the south-west corner of the site, but it didn't uncover the industrial site itself (or, more accurately, it didn't identify that site). As the Council's Principal Historic Environment Officer has noted - a Roman glass-making site would be unique in the whole Bristol area (CD3.16).

4. Even further excavation of the development site might not positively locate the site of the Roman glass-working, as workshops could lie just outside the perimeter. If the glass-workings were nearby, the significance of the surrounding area would be enormously enhanced but require further detailed evaluation. It's overwhelmingly likely that, despite the best efforts of the current archaeologists to leave some features intact, the proposed housing development would destroy all hope of further exploration (especially with the archaeology being relatively near the ground surface). I note that extensive excavations and a SuDs scheme is planned for the fields where the Roman enclosure was found and Roman glass-making site is probably located (CD1.10, CD1.27 & CD2.3 b)).
5. As the Council's Principal Historic Environment Officer also noted: *'Development of this site will cause a high degree of harm to this archaeological material'* (CD3.16), which, though it might be able to record what was found, would destroy the archaeology and prevent any further detailed evaluation of the site being done.
6. Increasingly, archaeology is about understanding the landscape, and evaluating the process of change that has shaped and reshaped the world in which we live. The meadows have been preserved as agricultural fields since the end of the Roman period, and they offer a living window into Brislington's history and beyond. The view from the slopes looks down on the medieval church at the heart of what was then a village in rural Somerset, and across to the horizon where the ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort on Dundry Hill are rooted in the field where Brislington Brook has its source (tributaries on the borders of the proposed development currently drain the meadows into this brook).
7. This high panorama is not only full of visual interest but, like a picture book of history, it invites the mind to delve through time itself - inspiring us to consider the connectedness of ourselves and our environment, our past, and our future. Being south-facing, it's ideally situated to welcome visitors in all seasons.
8. The site of Brislington Meadows itself has a wealth of valuable heritage assets. At least five of these fields have lynchet risers of unknown date (CD11.4 (c)). Most of these lynchet risers have hedges set carefully along the top of the riser, and these are clearly visible both at the site and in the maps in Appendix B of Part 1 of the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy produced by Homes England (CD1.27). In addition, LiDAR suggests medieval ridge and furrow ploughing at more than one of these fields (CD11.4 (i) & CD11.6 (k & l)).

9. There is also a large crater from a World War II bomb that struck a hedgerow and was backfilled with domestic debris - possibly from nearby bombed houses (CD11.6 (m)). This crater is now effectively a time capsule and, should planning permission go ahead (and if a suitable condition were applied to that approval), it would provide an excellent focus for a 'community archaeology' project.
10. The mortared stone walls of a centuries-old stock pond still hold water (CD11.4 (g)). While relatively dry in the heat of summer, at other times of year the area is usually wet, making it not only a long-surviving habitat, but also potentially a repository of organic remains of archaeological interest, which can persist in a water-logged environment. There is a persistent local supposition that this was formerly a wagon pond, which, were investigation substantiate this claim, would make it even more significant in terms of heritage value.
11. A public footpath that runs all the way across the site and continues for several miles to the town of Keynsham - the administrative centre of its ancient eponymous Hundred - appears to be a Priest's Path connecting the mother Abbey with the Brislington home of the chaplain of the 13th century Chapel of St Anne in the Wood (CD11.4 (f)).
12. The site is also a large and well-preserved survival of the intermediate phase of a continuous series of field types (CD11.4 (a)). It's sandwiched between the amorphous fields that are taken to be the early enclosure of the medieval open field system (to the south), and the regular compartments created by the 1778 enclosure of Brislington Common (to the north) (CD11.4 (e)). The site's roughly rectangular fields therefore represent a particular phase of social change in Brislington, whose history is as yet largely unexplored. These field boundaries almost certainly predate 1750 (see Annex 1).
13. To lose this unique heritage resource now, when so many alternative brownfield sites are available for housing development, would always be remembered as a tragic error of judgement. Worse than that, there are pockets of serious deprivation within easy walking distance of this site. And, according to the 2015 to 2019 comparison of multiple deprivation CD11.9 (c)), Brislington is one of Bristol's most increasingly deprived areas and includes neighbourhoods in the nation's 10% of most deprived areas. This site is a locally unparalleled natural amenity with 'big sky' views and sun-drenched slopes and provides desperately needed health benefits 24/7 - its removal would inflict a deep and lasting wound on the local community.
14. The desire of Homes England to turn the greenfield site of Brislington Meadows into housing may be regarded as 'merely' another step in the

time-honoured process of repurposing the land. In consideration of the above though, it's revealed as a step in the wrong direction. That such a development is being attempted during a human-induced climate emergency, shines a very bright light on the short-term thinking that brought us to this crisis. The planning proposal may seem attractive as a quick fix to a chronic housing problem, but the damage caused by the

proposed development would be irreparable, and the social cost would be out of all proportion to the current need.

Ken Taylor

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Chair

Brislington Community Museum

Annex 1

Some notes on the history of hedges directly affected by the proposed development of Brislington Meadows by Homes England

Ken Taylor (2023)

There's little documentation to shed light on the dates of the hedges directly affected by the proposed Brislington Meadows development, but an attempt may be made both to categorise them according to their history, and to work toward a relative chronology.

This document uses the Master Plan from the planning application by Homes England.



The Roman ditches found during the developer's excavation in 2022 and recorded in their Archaeological Survey, were dug into the natural soil, so they provide the earliest evidence of boundaries on the site. Neither the excavations nor the geophysical survey (from which the targets for excavation were selected) went up to all hedges.

Moving forward to the medieval period, the development site includes land that appears to be A) common land known as Brislington Common, and B) part of the open field system of agriculture. These lands were used in very different ways, so we can conveniently consider them separately.

A) Brislington Common

We need to subdivide our consideration of hedges affected by the 1778 Act of Enclosure into two categories.

1) New boundaries

The development site includes a field boundary that was wholly created in the Enclosure of Brislington Common (1778). Before the Act of Enclosure this was open common land, this boundary is one of the eponymous enclosures. See illustration below.



2) The boundary between the common and the open field

The site of the proposed development includes two substantial portions of the boundary between Brislington Common and the medieval open field. This boundary could conceivably have been hedged since the medieval period. See illustrations below.





At least part of the existing hedge is set on a bank, and the early Ordnance Survey maps (such as the 1st Edition on Know Your Place, around 1880) shows it contained mature trees.

B) Open field

In addition to the boundary between open field and Brislington Common discussed above, the site of the proposed Homes England development includes two substantially different sets of hedges.

1) Lynchet and late stock hedges

The lynchets were built up on top of, and overlie the Roman archaeology, so in terms of the relative chronology we may be confident the lynchets are more recent than the Roman period.

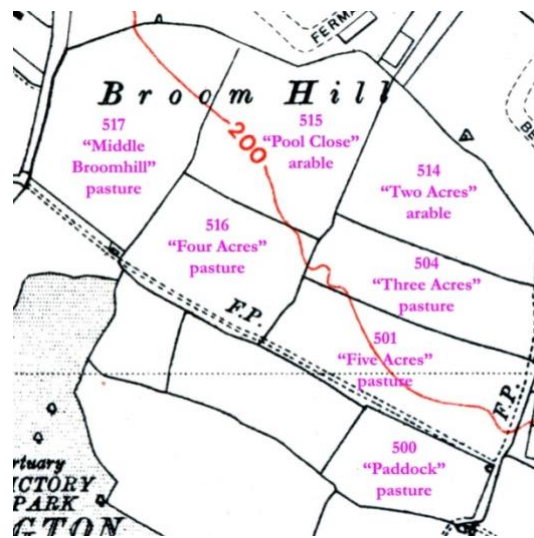
LiDAR evidence suggests this free-draining, south-facing hillside was ploughed for arable use, and the patterns of ridge and furrow that can be seen in some, if not all, the fields is the likely cause of the movement of soil that built the lynchets.

If the lynchets and ridge and furrow ploughing are of medieval date (as is most likely, but far from certain) and part of the usual open field system of agriculture, then this land would not have had hedges at that time. The hedges would have been installed when the land use changed to pasture.

There are some documents that can help us to date the hedges that appeared on the top of the lynchet risers. The 1st edition OS map (c. 1880) shows there were some large trees in these hedges at that time.

The Brislington Tithe Map & Apportionment (1846) tells us these fields were all used as pasture except for the two closest to the top of the hill.

See illustrations below (which uses the 1938 OS map which has essentially the same field layout as the tithe).



The 1778 Act of Enclosure produced a map of the newly enclosed fields (held at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton, reference Q/RDE/130). This map describes the area of the proposed development as "old enclosures" which suggests the originally open lynchets were at that time enclosed by hedges. Even the fields that remained arable would require hedges to protect their crops from the livestock in the new pastures.

Also, by the 1750s the usual process for enclosing fields was by an Act of Parliament (as eventually happened in Brislington in 1778), so the lack of such an Act indicates these enclosures occurred informally, before say 1750.

Only one of the hedges associated purely with the lynchets would survive in the Master Plan (a side hedge, not a lynchet riser). See illustration below.



2) Early stock hedges

The hedges at the lower (southern) boundary of the proposed development site, alongside which runs the ancient footpath, are very different from the late stock hedges discussed above. For one thing this hedge line isn't planted on the top of the lynchet risers, but at the bottom (and not immediately at the bottom, but on the far side of the footpath). The footpath is part of a route that connects parts of Brislington that have medieval settlements, with the town of Keynsham, and is likely to be of commensurate age.

The 1st edition OS map (c. 1880) shows there are many mature trees along this hedgerow, in places providing a continuous canopy. This pattern of tree distribution is also to be found in the hedgerows of the fields further to the south. Although LiDAR provides some suggestion of ridge and furrow ploughing in some of these southerly fields, the greater development of the hedgerows indicate they were enclosed as pasture at a much earlier date than the fields with the lynchets already discussed. See illustration below.



Bibliography

The 1846 Tithe map is available online from Bristol City Council (<https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp>).

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LDA Design Consulting Ltd (for Homes England) 2022, *Master Plan*, Bristol City Council, https://pa.bristol.gov.uk/online-applications/files/D801C83649058A3640074E4BE61E0D41/pdf/22_01878_P-ILLUSTRATIVE_MASTERPLAN-3200507.pdf (accessed 12 May 2022).

Ordnance Survey 1938, Provisional Edition, *Somerset Sheet VI NE*, (resized from 1:10560, 6 inches to the mile).