

A little History Part 3

A Short History of the Common

Part 3

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Common was owned by a sand and gravel company, and the southern part of the Common was worked as a major gravel pit. This accounts for the steep sides to the edges of the Common and the banks of discarded washed sand. The large concrete base where the main stone crushing machinery stood was later used by a farmer for storing sugar beet. The damp areas in the centre below the Mill are a relic of the washing pits, once fenced off warning of dangerous Quicksand, now however thought to be safe. There are still remains of lorries in there. A sheer cliff was created below Ralphs Mill and the two houses, almost too close, so it had to be reprofiled soon after to the slope that we see there today. The extractions were scaled down in the early 1960s and ceased by the middle of the decade.

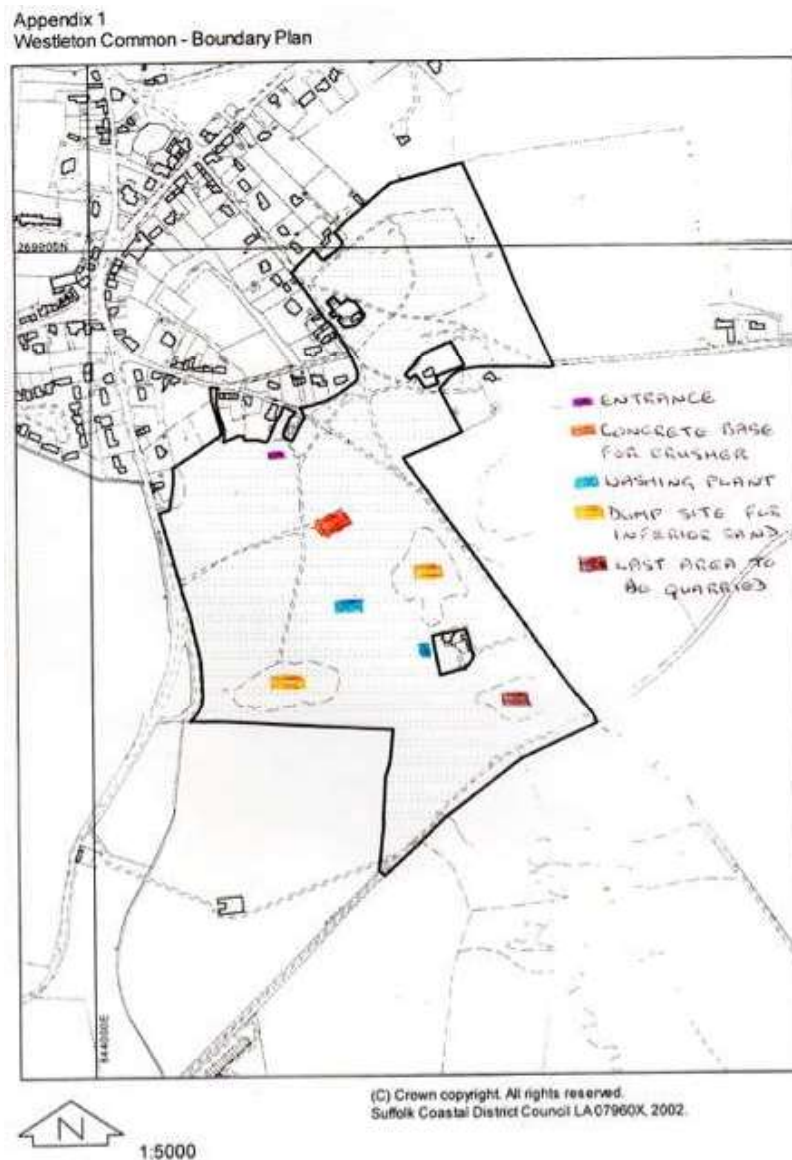


Loading the gravel from the cliff below the Mill, approx 1940's. *Alf Fisk*

A major village enterprise was undertaken in 1977 on the northern section of the Common. A large area was cleared of gorse, including by burning, ploughed and planted with grass seed and set out as football field. Sports teams and groups made regular use of this until the 1990s. The mowing has resulted in a good area of short heather.

An area next to the layby on the Reckford Road was used for some years by Suffolk County Council as a dump for soil and other road diggings. This brought in different plants not found elsewhere on the Common. The high bank was landscaped and made safer in January 2004.

Map of the Common showing the areas of Gravel Workings



The gravel company, RMC (Ready Mixed Concrete), tried unsuccessfully to reopen planning permission for more gravel extraction nearby in the 1990s. As it was no longer any use to them, they then put the Common on the market, and after a lot of hard work on negotiations, it was bought by Westleton Parish Council in 2003, with the major help of Heritage Lottery funding.

Interest in the wildlife value of the Common was apparent by the 1980s, when the Suffolk Wildlife Trust became involved. In the early 1990s they guided gorse clearing work parties recruited from the village. Once the village owned the Common, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Suffolk Coastal District Council provided major input into setting up the management of the Common.

Alison Paul and Frances Berry, with the help of Ronnie Strowger, Morgan Caines, Barbara Caines, Jill Houghton, Frank Rouse, Jean Rouse, Penny Rous and Ann Follows

(Alf Fisk's photographs are reproduced courtesy of Cana Turner)

Further details are in the Annual Reports for the Common for 2007, gravel workings, and 2006, wartime reminiscences. The Annual Reports can be found on the Common's section on the Westleton Village website. An audio CD and illustrated transcript has been prepared "War, Life and Nature on Westleton Common, Ron Strowger's Boyhood Memories" and is in the Westleton Village Archives.