

# Introducing Mousehold Heath

*It is a Norfolk Exmoor, with little tors and vales, which are full of colour even at the end of September. In spring its hillocks and hollows are ablaze with gorse and broom.*  
(W.A. Dutt, 'Norfolk', 1900)



1. A view of Mousehold Heath from Silver Road, painted by John Sell Cotman, 1810.



2. A heathland regeneration area on the slopes of Long Valley.



3. Investigating the geology at Gilman Road.

Mousehold Heath is as much a part of Norwich life as the city streets – in fact cartloads of its sand and gravel have gone into making them. The Heath has been a valued resource for the people of Norwich for over a thousand years: it has provided turf and timber, land for grazing animals, and huge quantities of brickearth, sand and gravel.

Today's Mousehold Heath is a small remnant of a wider tract of open heathland which once extended north-eastwards towards the Bure valley, including Rackheath and Blofield Heath.

Most areas were enclosed in the early 19th century, but the Norwich end of Mousehold Heath remained as a rolling and hummocky expanse of heather and bracken, home to distinctive heathland wildlife and pockmarked with quarry pits and hollows. It was maintained as an open space by the nibbling teeth of rabbits and sheep, by continuing removal of furze for firewood and by the disturbance caused by constant quarrying.

In 1884 Mousehold Heath became a 'People's Park', and quarrying ceased in the main part of the Heath. A team of 352 unemployed men was used to carry out landscaping and tree planting. While a few areas of original heathland remain today, carefully maintained for their fragile wildlife value, tree cover has been gradually increasing over the last 70 years, so that most of the historic heath has now become a wooded area; the old quarry workings have become vegetated pits and dells. Mousehold Heath is now a designated County Wildlife Site.

Mousehold Heath has a fascinating Earth heritage. Imagine peeling back its surface layers to reveal the underlying geology and landforms.

We invite you to discover more about the 'geodiversity' of the Heath, the natural processes which have shaped it over deep time, and its history of quarrying.

## Photo credits

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