



A Brief History of Allerthorpe Common

The history of Allerthorpe Common can be traced back to AD 1086 when it was recorded in the Domesday book as Aluuarstorp. This name suggests a subsidiary Scandinavian settlement. Aluuarstorp literally means "thorpe" or village belonging to a man called Alfard.

Pollen counts taken during the mid 1970s show that the common has for the last 2,000 years been covered with heather and birch with a little pine. As the trees were cleared for more pasture land during Anglo-Saxon times the pollen count shows a marked increase in the amount of grass pollen. By the time of enclosure the common would have been characterised by coarse grasses, heather, birch and a few pines.

The house-holders of Allerthorpe had common rights to pasture their cattle on the common and to cut turves once a year. They could also take gorse and wood for repairs.

At the time of enclosure (1750-1800) there were two by-lawmen responsible for supervising the taking of wood from the common. One was responsible for Low Moor and one for High Moor. This supervision continued until 1870.

By the mid 19th century the common was isolated in the surrounding agricultural land. By 1926 the common was becoming drier due to the improved drainage of the surrounding farm land.

The Forestry Commission first showed interest in the area in about 1950. Enquiries were made to the Nature Conservancy Council and to some Yorkshire botanists, a number of whom mistakenly considered the area to be of little importance, with the result that the Forestry Commission went ahead with negotiations for the purchase of the area.

In 1963 the Forestry Commission commenced ploughing and considerable areas were drained with a system of 1-2 metre drains. By 1966 the new drains were completed and over half a million Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Austrian pine *Pinus nigra var Maritima* and Lodgepole pine *Pinus contorta* planted.

Up to this time, Allerthorpe was one of three lowland heaths in the Vale of York and was one of the last extensive tracts of semi natural vegetation in the East Riding. The reserve area was chosen for preservation as it represented the range of heathland habitats that were present on the larger Common area.

The whole common was designated a SSSI in 1965 mainly on account of its botanical value.