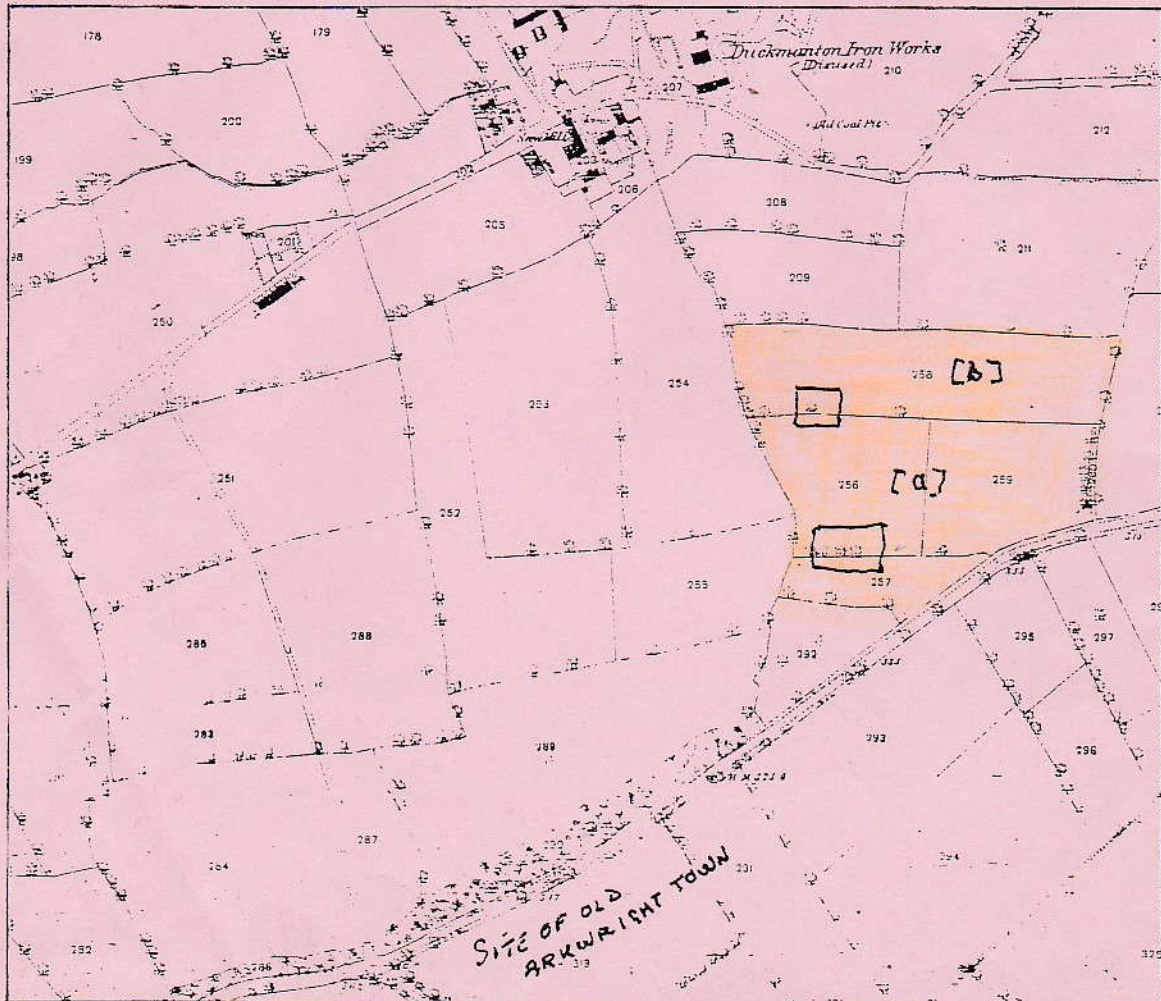




THE ARKWRIGHT OAKS

G. Downs-Rose





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Four oak trees stood in fields inside the trackway of the old Great Central Railway loop line on the proposed site for the new village of Arkwright Town. In April 1993 the trees were cut down as part of the preparation of the site. One was 172 years old. This is a note on their history, so far as it has been traced.

'MAP 1', See Cover, is taken from the 1876 25-inch Ordnance Survey, Sheet XXV, 8. It shows the fields on the north side of the A632 Chesterfield - Bolsover Road as they were 20 years before old Arkwright Town was built. The positions of the four oak trees at that time are marked on the Map. They were part of two field hedges.

Older maps tell us more about the fields. In 1766 they were part of the church glebe: that is, land set aside in the parish to provide income for the church minister. (Under the lordship of Welbeck Abbey, the manor of Duckmanton had a church and vicar from 1187.) In 1766, Field '[a]' on the map, of 7 acres, was named 'Parson's Near Moor Close', and the one marked '[b]', 6 acres, was named 'Parson's Far Moor Close'. The four oak trees did not exist at the time of the 1766 Map, for a count of the rings in the trunk of the oldest shows it began life in 1820.

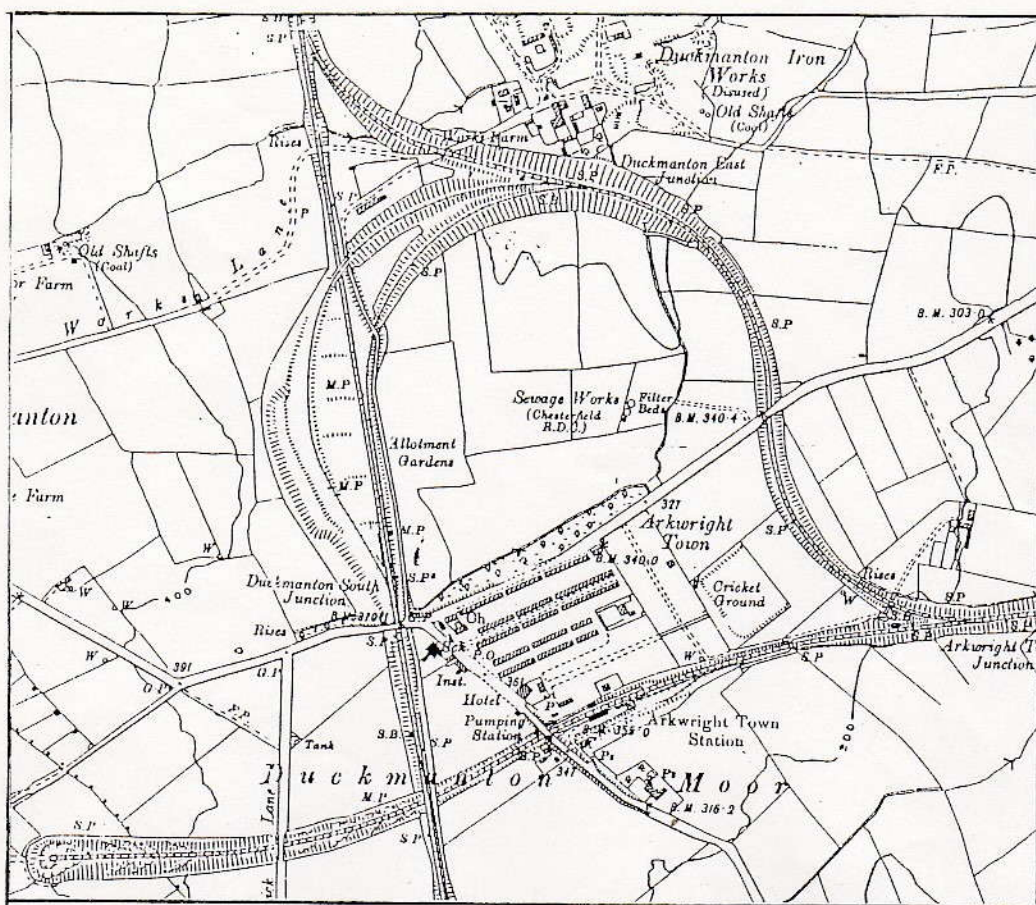
In 1837, a survey was made of the land in the parish to establish how much land there was so that a tithe could be levied on the rental value and paid by the land-owner and tenants. On the Sutton-cum-Duckmanton Tithe Map, our two fields are named 'Great Moor Close (Glebe)' and 'Little Moor Close (Glebe)'. After the Survey they ceased to be church lands and were tenanted in the normal way by a local farmer.

So the two fields remained unchanged in size from at least as early as 1766 until the loop line was built to link the old Great Central Railway's Sheffield to Nottingham line with the Chesterfield to Lincoln line on which Arkwright Station stood. When the loop was built in 1905-1907 it cut through the two old fields, as shown on 'MAP 2', Page 2. The new village of Arkwright Town is being built inside the northern part of the loop, and the fields will disappear.

We know from the 1766 Map that the fields had hedges at that time. In fact, the ages of the fields go much farther back, to the time when that part of Duckmanton Moor was divided up so that farmers could cultivate what had previously been waste and woodland. This enclosure of the land occurred in medieval times, and the names 'Moor' and 'Close' appear in many of the old field names on Duckmanton Moor.

Hawthorne was usually planted for hedging when the land was enclosed because it deterred the cattle and sheep from straying. But over time, centuries in fact, other trees grew up in the hedgerows and became part





MAP 2

of them. Some trees were allowed to grow to maturity because of the value of their wood, especially oak, ash and beech trees whose timbers were prized by builders, carpenters and joiners. This was probably the case with the four oak trees in the glebe-land hedgerows. Then, for some reason, when they reached maturity, they were left untouched.

The hedgerows where the oaks grew were grubbed out after the Sutton Estate Sale in 1919 and, for a time, coppiced-wood fencing may have replaced them, for wrought-iron fencing nails were found in the boles of the trees when they were cut down. The three trees which stood in a row, and the lone oak, survivor from the other hedge, were examined, photographed and measured by the writer in the summer of 1992. The trunks and some branches had been damaged by disease and, or lightning. The fourth tree was in very good condition. It stood forty-eight feet high and had a spread of nearly sixty feet. This is the tree whose rings were counted, after it was felled in 1993, to establish its age- 172 years.

Beneath the ground on which the oak stood were seams, or 'rakes' of iron ore, and seams of coal, the reason for the medieval and later mining on the



Moor. When this tree began life in 1820, the Adelphi Ironworks, only 300 yards away, were producing 900 tons of cast iron each year, and continued to do so for another 25 years. At its closure, some of the works buildings were turned into Works Farm.

In 1882, the Staveley Coal & Iron Company leased the whole of the minerals under the Sutton Scarsdale Estate and sank the Markham collieries between 1883 and 1887. In 1897 the company prepared to build old Arkwright Town to house the families of its miners. The tree was a youthful seventy-seven years at the time.

Some of the grand-parents of today's Arkwright Town children may remember playing in the fields where the old oaks stood, and having 'pretend picnics' under their branches. A few may remember a sunny Saturday when a score or more 'Ramblers' - the new keep-fit movement of the 1930's economic depression - took a rest under the trees. They will certainly remember how Mr. 'Dickie' Roach, who started a road haulage business at Arkwright Town, kept hens in the field and a gun to scare off the foxes.

In 1938, when the fourth oak tree was approaching early middle-age (118 years) a small drift mine was sunk opposite Nursery Farm. During the 1939-45 War, the trees escaped damage from the bombs which were dropped nearby to the north of the old village. In 1947 all the coal mines passed into public ownership; the coal companies and mineral owners were compensated by the tax payers. Arkwright Colliery prospered and had a life of fifty years. It closed in 1988 and there followed the methane scare which led to the decision to move the village. Otherwise the tree would have survived until the few deep mines which remain go back to private ownership.

Fortunately, the 'fourth' tree will not be forgotten. In 1992 British Coal Opencast at the request of the 'Back To The Future Group' promised to give a slice taken from its trunk to Arkwright School. When the slice has been seasoned, and its surface polished, its annular rings will be clearly seen and will be marked with the dates of important local and national events, such as those mentioned above. So, as a 'history book' this 172-year old tree will survive to remind future generations of Arkwright children of the community's history and its rural environment.

G. Downs-Rose 29. 4. 93