

NEWHALL VALLEY

Walking in the Newhall Valley in the month of May
I never cease to be amazed at nature's proud display

Buttercups, Bluebells, Stitchwort too
Crowsfoot, Cowslips, to name but a few

Carpets of Clover, purple and white
Yellow Rattle, Campions bright

Ox Eye Daisies put on a show
And Ragged Robins freely grow

Blossom, as confetti falls
Whilst, far away, a cuckoo calls

Now, what are these that flutter by?
The Meadow Brown, the butterfly

The sly fox slinking out of sight
It's bushy tail, a banner bright

Once, when walking through the wood
Frozen in fear, before me stood

Two Munkjac Deer who then took flight
Into the thicket and out of sight

The boardwalk leads us to the brook
A place to stop and take a look

Perchance to see a wondrous sight
A flash of blue, the Kingfisher's flight

Where herons and egrets stand on parade
And near the rocks, grey wagtails wade

Plantsbrook was diverted many years ago
But it still remains obvious where once it did flow



Beside the channel where water would have been
An ancient Burnt Mound can still be seen

Where mounds of heat shattered stones lie on the edge of the stream
As hot stones were put in the water to cause the creation of steam

For sauna type bathing or simply to cook
Or religious rituals beside the brook

Dr Mike Hodder by the Burnt mound in New Hall Valley.



Historical discovery

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**EXCLUSIVE BY
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THE BURNT MOUND MYSTERY: kitchen or sauna?

City council archaeologist Dr Mike Hodder has uncovered evidence of prehistoric people using New Hall Valley.

Eagle-eyed Dr Hodder was out walking in the country park with his mother in February when he spotted a slight rise in the ground off the beaten track.

He immediately recognised this to be a burnt mound - a pile of heat-shattered stone, charcoal and ash that was used either as a sauna or part of a kitchen.

Subsequent research has revealed that the area was used, possibly by no more than a small family group, more than 3,000 years ago.

The mound is similar to others found previously in Sutton Park, at Langley Hall and at more than 30 other sites across the city.

They provide fascinating evidence of nomadic people wandering from area to area in years between 1,500BC and 1,000BC.

Dr Hodder said: "These mounds date back to the Bronze Age. Stones have been shattered because of heat action. The stones were heated up and water was poured on them to produce steam - it was a method also used by various North American Indian groups. Almost always these mounds are in quite wet areas near to streams - the site in New Hall Valley is right next to where the original stream [Ebrook] was. It was re-routed in the 60s."

The mound, quite unassuming in appearance, is oval-shaped and is 12 metres long and ten metres wide, but only half a metre high.

Dr Hodder added: "I found it almost purely by chance but it is a very exciting discovery. We would have expected, given the number of burnt mound sites there are in Birmingham, for there to be one in New Hall Valley, but this takes the known history of the area back another couple of thousand years.

"We can certainly say there would have been at least a family group dwelling somewhere nearby, on higher ground."

There was an alternative theory that the heated stones may have been used as a cooker.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints helped Dr Hodder to carry out a measured survey of the site at the end of June, producing a contour map to help preserve the plot.

"It will help to make sure that any work proposed in New Hall Valley will leave that site well alone," Dr Hodder said.

Local historian Marian Baxter, a member of the New Hall Valley Steering Group said: "This discovery gives us a link across from the burnt mounds at Sutton Park and at Langley, showing us how the nomadic travellers followed streams.

"We know of life in the Valley from buildings from the 1100s and 1200s but never knew of anything earlier.

"The burnt mounds represent places where people may have stayed perhaps only for a couple of weeks, built a hut and then moved on.

"It really is exciting to have found this. It's proof that we had prehistoric people moving around Sutton Coldfield."

Where Rosebay Willowherb is found
And Ladies Smock – in boggy ground

And though the route is passable today
Winter flooding can bar the way

Close by, Newhall Mill is found
On open days fresh flour is ground



The valley takes on a different look when frosty or in snow
Oasis of calm and beauty whenever you choose to go

But now - the song thrush beckons me to stay
In Newhall – in the month of May.



Anne Nash

*Photographs by Anne Nash and Keith Jordan
Newscutting from Keith Jordan's Collection*