

**Country
lives**
Exploring the
English countryside
from 1800

Changing rural landscapes

Urbanisation and industrialisation led to rapid change affecting rural landscapes during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

THE WILD SPRING-CROCUS
IN NOTTINGHAM MEADOWS.



It, though it is an English flower,
It only groweth here and there:
Through merry England you might
ride;
Through all its length from side to
side;
Through fifty counties, nor have
spied
This flower so passing fair.

But in these meadows it is growing,
And now it is the early spring;

N

‘Acre upon acre of meadow
is so thickly covered that the
green appearance of the fields
is changed to a most lovely
blue purple. Since building
has encroached upon the
meadow-land, however, the
crocus is dying out. The only
other locality in England where
the crocus is found wild is at
Mendham, Suffolk’.

(The Midland Naturalist, 1882)

The expansion of towns and cities reduced the amount of green or open spaces surrounding them. Although this led to the creation of public parks, some restricted entry by only opening at certain times or charging. The growth of extractive industries, such as coal mining, encroached on agricultural land. New mining settlements, ranging in size, were then built. Despite all the change, remnants of the countryside can still be found in towns and suburbs.

The Meadows, located on the south side of Nottingham, was once fertile grassland. Many nineteenth century publications made reference to the annual carpet of Spring crocus. Mary Howitt was inspired by this scene and wrote the poem *The Wild Spring-Crocus in Nottingham Meadows* in 1833.

The land on which University Park Campus now stands belonged to Lenton Priory in the twelfth century. After the dissolution of the priory in 1538, the land changed hands several times. After 1798 a number of large residential properties were built including Lenton Firs.



Left: From Mary Howitt, *Mary Howitt's sketches of natural history* (1864). University of Nottingham, Special Collection Not 1.W8 HOW/MY

Above: Print of an engraving of Nottingham from the Meadows, 19th century. University of Nottingham, Manuscript Collections MS 484/7/10

Background left: E.J. Lowe, *A Natural History of British Grasses* (1871). University of Nottingham Special Collection QK 495.G74 LOW



Above: Plan from sale particulars of an estate in Lenton, c.1867. University of Nottingham. Copyright Middleton Collection, Mi 4 E 137

Right: Image from volume of hand-coloured photographs relating to Lenton Firs, c.1930. University of Nottingham, Manuscript Collections MS 940/2



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