



The history of the Clunbury Parish land on Black Hill



Acknowledgements

While I may have put the words of this account into some sort of order, I could not have done so without the help and support of many people. Firstly, I should like to thank Tom and Gisèle Wall for the invitation to write this article as well as much advice about its content. Other members of the Clunbury Climate and Environment group - Helen White, Jonathan Salmon and Ellison Bibby - helped in various ways.

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A lot of the resources were derived from Shropshire Archives. Thanks are due to the staff in Shrewsbury for their help, advice and patience. These resources are shown as extracts in figs. 2,3,6,7,8,30 as well as maps 2 and 3. Shropshire Archive also provided some of the newspapers to the British Newspaper Archive which are listed below.

The British Newspaper Archive was the source of all the cuttings used in the article. Copyrights for those extracts are as follows –

Shropshire Council for figs. 1,5,13,17,18,20,21,22,23,24,26,29.

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The images used in map 5, map 6, figs. 10, 27, 28 are from <https://maps.nls.uk/>

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Maps used in maps 1, 2 and 4 contain OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2026. Further details at the Open Government Licence (OGL) v3.0 at <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/>

The extract in fig.12 is from '*A Country education: A history of the schools at Clunbury in the County of Shropshire*' by Christopher Train – Published in 1999 by Scenesters, Bucknell, Shropshire. ISBN 1-874200-07-6. Despite enquiries, I have been unable to contact either the author or publisher but am grateful for the use of this extract.

The photograph in fig. 15(b) is from the P.B. Aberly collection which is held at the National Museum of Wales and can be viewed at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/llgc/albums/72157617331377503/>

The photograph is probably the original work of Robert Newton Heywood of Knighton (1877-1935).

I am grateful to the Chairman of the Shropshire Geology Society for permission to reproduce the photographs of peat cuttings used in fig. 9.

Much of section 6 of the article uses a structure of forestry management suggested in -

'Forestry paradigms and policy change: The evolution of forestry policy in Britain in relation to the ecosystem approach' Author: Susanne Raum, Clive Potter. Publisher: Elsevier. Date: December 2015.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC-BY license and can be viewed at - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264837715002562>

Other extracts and references from Forestry England, HMSO, HM Treasury are also published copyright free.

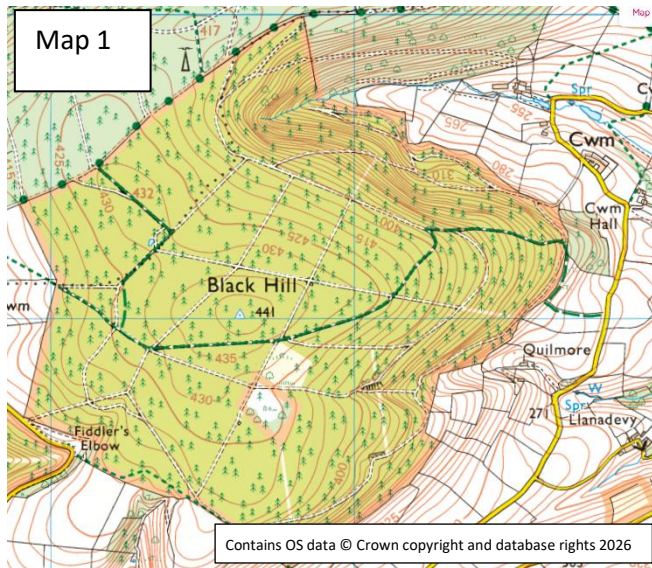
John Bibby (April 2026) for the Clunbury Climate and Environment Group.

1 Introduction¹

Black Hill in Shropshire, which is the subject of this account, can be confused with physical features elsewhere of the same name. There may also be confusion concerning the setting of the 1982 novel 'On the Black Hill' by Bruce Chatwin. He stayed at nearby Cwm Hall when writing the book, used some local place names e.g. Lurkenhope and probably based some events and characters on people from this area, but the geographical setting for events in 'On the Black Hill' was probably in and around Black Hill on the Breconshire/Herefordshire border.

Land 'ownership' is a contentious issue. Countless legal and actual battles have taken place in Britain over the centuries about who *owns* a particular piece of land and indeed, morally speaking, whether anyone can *own* land. Such disputes and their spiritual or legal underpinning is not the subject of this article. Instead, an attempt is made here to identify the way in which one particular piece of land on Black Hill has been managed in ways so that it now has a distinctive character and appearance.

On the current (2025) Ordnance Survey map of the area (map 1), the parish land or 'turbary' is distinguishable from its surroundings. It is located just south of the centre and the summit (441 m asl). Whereas most of Black Hill is shaded green representing woodland (mainly coniferous), the turbary is uncoloured and with symbols representing bracken, rough grassland and scrub.



Also noticeable on map 1 is the use of an orange border around the southern part of the uncoloured area. This border designates 'Open Access' land. Since most of Black Hill is designated as Open Access by the orange border surrounding the forest, the rectangular orange border of the turbary marks that area as NOT Public Access land. Open Access in Forestry England forests allows the general public to walk, run, bird-watch etc. but not to use mechanical or powered vehicles. The reason for the S and N parts of the turbary being designated differently arises from the original demarcation of the turbary which will now be considered.

The Inclosure Acts of Parliament²

The tract of land (covering 9 acres 30 perches or about 3.75 hectares) which is administered by Clunbury Parish Council and in this article is called "the turbary" or "Whinberry Hill" as defined by an "Enclosure award and map of Obley (township in the parish of Clunbury), Shropshire". The Obley award was one of a series around the country following the Act of Parliament which created Commissioners in 1845.³ The several purposes of Inclosure Commissioners were to standardise the procedure of enclosure, to try to avoid an enclosure process being dominated by a small number of powerful local landowners who had been inclined to influence decisions to their own advantage. And thirdly, to allow the Commissioners to approve enclosures without having to submit them to parliament.

In the case of Obley⁴, and those of several awards in the area (e.g. Clun, Knighton, Wentnor, Asterton) the Commissioner was William Eyton from Gonsal near Condover. The Obley award consists of six large pages of

¹ The cover page includes a 19th century photograph of berry pickers in the Black Hill area but the precise destination for this group was not necessarily 'Whinberry Hill' in the way that this account uses the name.

² Enclosure is a historic term where land was consolidated or reorganized land under the Inclosure Acts. Inclosure and Enclosure are commonly interchangeable terms but have two distinct meanings. Inclosure is the statutory and legal form of the word "enclosure" in reference to the enclosure of land. Enclosure is the process. All the Acts of Parliament use the term "Inclosure" not enclosure.

Enclosure is the process by which an individual was granted a piece of land, in place of rights over manorial waste (land which the Lord of Manor and the serfs did not have under cultivation).

From: <https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/Glossary/UKPracticalLaw/>

³ For a more detailed explanation of the process of enclosure in Britain as determined by statute please see - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclosure#Inclosure_Act_1845

From this page are links to several academic papers dealing with aspects of the same topic.

⁴ The Award from which extracts are shown is held at the National Archives (ref. MAF 1/392) and dated 1849-1850 with a copy held at Shropshire Archive (ref. QE/1/2/59).

handwritten text and eight pages of tables setting out the allocations of land, the individuals concerned and the official confirmation by the Commissioner. In addition, there are two maps (A and B) both about 1m. x 2m. in size.

The enclosure process must have taken a long period of time to complete since there were no existing accurate maps that could be referred to. Instead the area was surveyed and 'trigged'⁵ by Charles Mickleburgh of Montgomery and while map A is dated 1851 and map B is dated 1849, they were not verified as accurate until August 1854 when the award was also signed and sealed. The process of receiving and assessing claims had taken place more than seven years earlier. See fig. 1⁶.

Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal - Wednesday 21 April 1847

Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal - Wednesday 12 May 1847

Content provided by Shropshire Council

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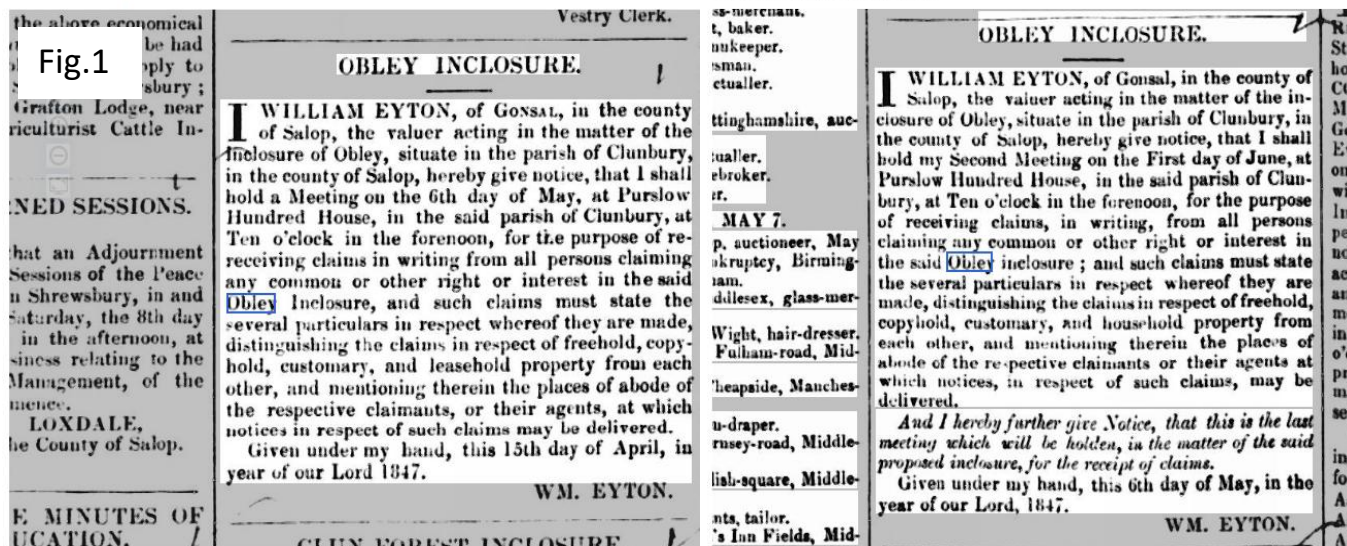


Fig. 2 shows extracts from the written Award allocating land for exercise/recreation (area 6 on map 2) and for cutting peat for personal use by the inhabitants of Obley (area 7 on map 2). The second extract is in two pieces because the paragraph goes from one page to the next in the Award. Map 2 is an extract from Map A of the Inclosure Award showing the turbary and recreation ground allocations. These are shown alongside a modern OS map which has been orientated to match.

And I further declare that I have set out and do hereby set out allot and award unto the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor of the said Township of Obley all that piece or parcel of land numbered 6 on the said Map containing Three acres and Twelve perches to be held by them and their successors in Trust as a piece of exercise and Recreation for the Inhabitants of the said Township and Neighbourhood And I direct that the fence on the northern side of the said Allotment shall be repaired and maintained by and at the expense of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor for the time being of the said Township

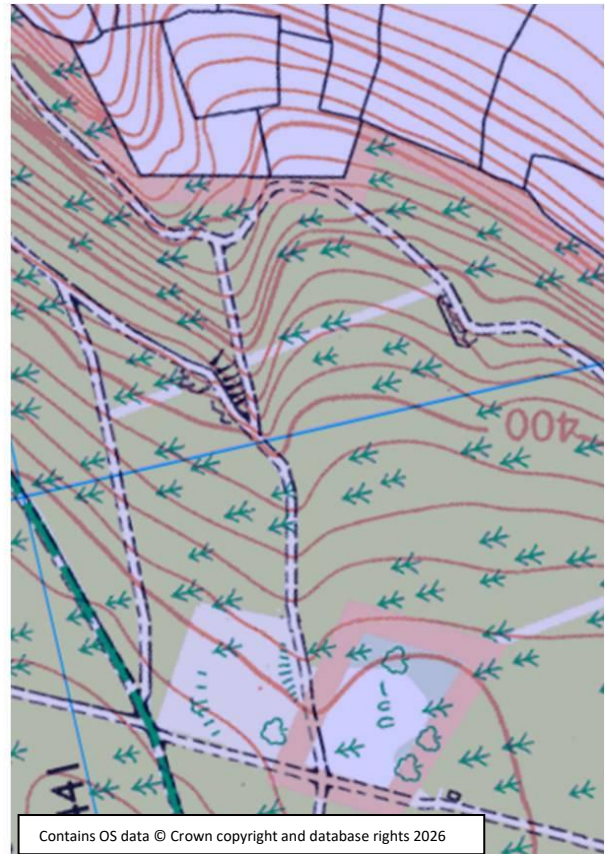
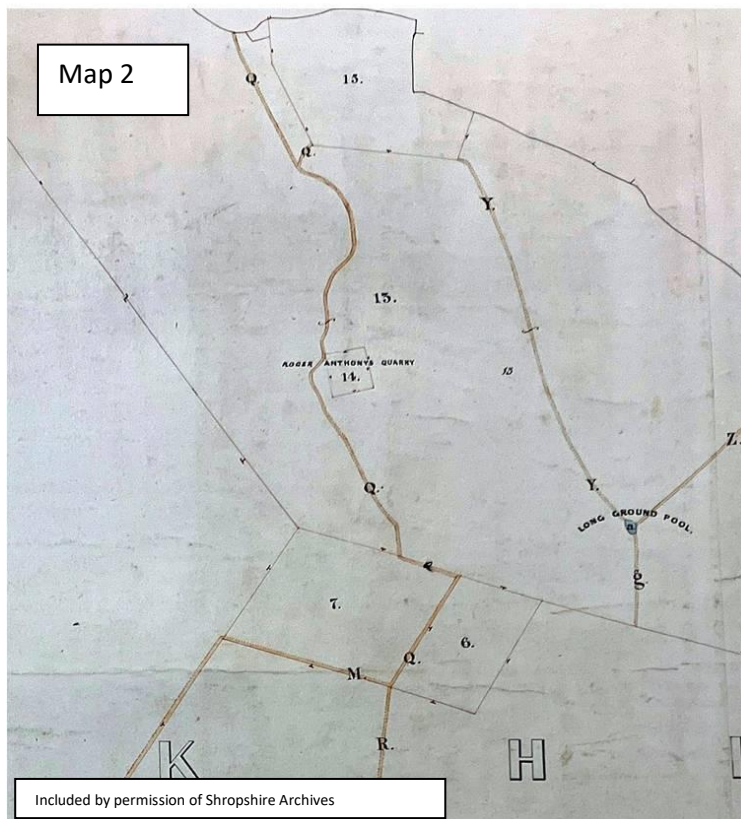
Fig. 2

And I have also set out and do hereby set out allot and award unto the said Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor All that piece or parcel of land numbered 7 on the said Map and containing Six acres and eighteen perches to be held by them and their successors in trust as an allotment to be appropriated and used by the Inhabitants of the said Township of Obley for the digging cutting and curing of peats to be used for fuel in and upon the messuages or other buildings within the said Township but not for sale or any other purpose whatsoever And I direct that the said Churchwardens and Overseers shall from time to time give directions and make regulations as to the mode in which the cutting or graft of the peats shall be conducted and that such cutting or graft shall be so conducted accordingly

Included by permission of Shropshire Archives

⁵ 'Trigged' was used commonly in newspaper notices of the time to indicate that an area had been accurately surveyed by triangulation.

⁶ Fig. 1 shows the first stage of the process – receiving claims. Further meetings were held in June and July to allow for people to inspect the claims, object to them and finally take part in a meeting of all concerned parties.



The area surveyed by Charles Mickleburgh and allotted by William Eyton amounted to 877 acres (355 hectares). Of this total, 70 acres was allotted to 2 farmers living and working in the Obley township, a further 129 acres to a farmer who lived in Abcott (about four miles east of Black Hill). He also had land in Obley. Over 650 acres were allocated to seven landowners who lived elsewhere. The 'Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor' of Clunbury Parish were awarded the 9.2 acres on Black Hill - allotments 6 (rec. ground) and 7 (turbary) - plus a 3-acre area of arable land on the nearby Lower Hill (allotment 35) plus an adjacent 1 acre (allotment 34). See fig. 6 and 7 for these locations. The combined area of allotments 34 and 35 was subsequently sold by the Parish Council to the farmer of the surrounding land but it retains the Open Access status which is shown on OS maps.

The land immediately next to the turbary/recreation ground was allocated to 3 different people. To the north (i.e. to the left of area 7 on map 2) was allocated to William Edwards Brettell Vaughan (WEBV), to the east (i.e. above the turbary on map 2) was allocated to the Trustees of the Estate of Richard Edwards. To the west (i.e. below the turbary on map 2), the land was allocated to the Earl of Powis.

However, by the end of 1860, WEBV had acquired the other 2 tracts to add to his own allocation, so the Parish Land became an 'island' within land owned by WEBV. He had also acquired land through inheritance around Cwm – he was nephew of both James and Richard Edwards whose estate had been allocated land by the Commissioner. On part of this inherited land, WEBV had built Cwm Hall to be his 'country seat'. Cwm Hall⁷ lies about 1 mile away from the turbary to the east (see map 1).

Two other questions should be addressed before moving forward from the time of the Inclosure Act of 1854 which created the Clunbury Parish land. Firstly, what was the area of Black Hill like before enclosure? Secondly, how did the Commissioner allocate the land of Black Hill and Lower Hill?

⁷ While the residence was called 'Cwm Hall' at WEBV's time, in some documents and on one Ordnance Survey map in the 19th century, it is named 'Cwm Villa'.