

Historic fishpond sites at Puttenham, with a provisional discussion of Surrey fishponds

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Recent fieldwork near Puttenham located a series of historic fishponds and the earthworks of former fishponds. These seem to have been part of a high concentration of such features in this area. What appears to be the oldest set can be identified as mentioned in an early 13th century charter. This article records these sites, and compares them with further fishpond sites in Surrey located during other Area of Special Historical Landscape Value surveys undertaken by the author. A distinctive type of fishpond is identified as associated with former common land in Surrey. These are discussed in relation to the limited research undertaken to date. The author suggests that systematic identification of known historic fishpond sites in Surrey should be undertaken by interested local archaeologists and historians, putting it in line with similar surveys in other counties such as Hampshire.

Introduction

In the 1990s, Surrey County Council and Surrey Archaeological Society began a programme of surveys of areas within the county worthy of recognition and exploration based on their special historic significance. A number of potential Areas of Special Historical Landscape Value (ASHLVs) were identified and researched by consultant specialists. Since May 1999 volunteers from local communities have been involved in the work as part of the Community Archaeology Project set up by the Society. As part of this fieldwork a series of historic fishponds and earthworks associated with former fishponds was identified. This paper discusses the sites found near Puttenham in some detail and compares them with other fishpond sites found elsewhere in the county during other ASHLV surveys. The locations of the ASHLV survey areas referred to in this article are shown on figure 1. These surveys were carried out under the management of the author and a series of full reports has been produced.¹

The Puttenham fishponds (fig 2)

THE HOLLOWBON (BRICK LEYS) COPSE GROUP (SU 9116 4800)

In a charter of *c* 1210, a grant of a virgate of land was made by Ralph de Fay to Robert de Barreville. This was located 'where the messuages [are] situated at the exit from Puttenham that is on the left side just as the road goes from Puttenham towards the ford of Totford' (*ubi masagia sedent in exitu de Puteham scilicet a sinistra parte sicita via tendit de Puteham versus vadum de Otteford*).² This document implies that a collection of houses existed near the east end of Lascombe Lane (SU 9276 4775), which probably lay close to the edge of the historic village. This same charter gives information about Shoelands (now Shoelands Farm, SU 9138 4758), which is also mentioned in the grant. The bounds of this estate are also described and, although they are now difficult to identify on the ground, certain landscape features that then existed can still be recognized today. The bounds are given as:

the land of Soland [Shoelands] in the parish of Puttenham as the boundary goes by metes from the thorn hedge (*spina*) which is in front of the house of Turbat

¹ Currie 1997; 1999; 2003; Currie *et al* 2000; 2001; Currie with Taberner 2002.

² SHC: 2609/11/5/35

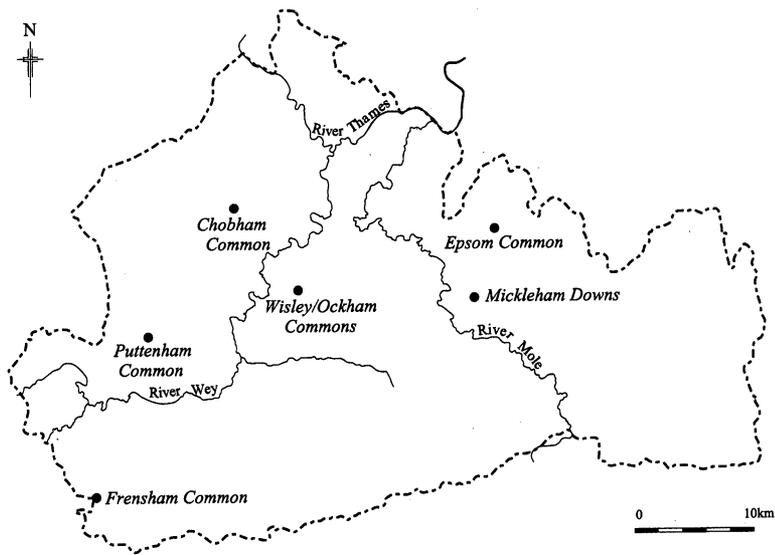


Fig 1 Historic fishponds: location map.

[Talbot] de Boscho just as the ditch (*fossatam*) reaches to the King's highway which comes from Puttenham aforesaid and goes as far as the ford (*vadum*) at Totford and hence also Senedic as the actual boundary is between the land of the Lord Bishop of Winchester [Seale in the bishop's Farnham manor] and the land of Lord Ralph de Fay and also to the common land of his men of Puttenham. Thence upstream just as the boundary between the common land of Puttenham and the land of Gorwy the smith these being one and a half acres of land which lie towards the headland (*capud*) of Soland which also I gave to the aforesaid Robert and his heirs for the increase of the aforesaid land and from thence just as the boundary lies to the wooded headland (*ad capud nemoris*) of the aforesaid Turbat de Bosco. Furthermore from the head of the aforesaid wood of Turbat all the way to the fishpond (*vivarium*) of the same Turbat and from the aforesaid fishpond just as the boundary lies as far as the gate of the aforesaid Turbat

Fieldwork during the recent ASHLV project has led to the recording of a series of fishpond earthworks at the head of the Cutt Mill stream, north of Shoelands Farm. It is thought that one of these may be the fishpond referred to in this charter. Although the exact interpretation of the bounds is uncertain, it would appear to describe a triangular piece of land bounded by the track now known as the North Downs Way on the south, the Cutt Mill stream on the west, and a line somewhere between Seale Lane and the Hog's Back on the north (possibly the ridge along the top of Stony Hill). There are no streams in this area other than the Cutt Mill stream, so it is assumed that this must be the stream feeding the above-mentioned fishpond.³

Hollowbon Copse currently contains the remains of three fishpond dams set at right-angles across the Cutt Mill stream. The highest of these probably contains the spring feeding this stream at its top end. None of the ponds contain features of great hydraulic expertise, being

³ A fuller exposition of this evidence can be found in Currie *et al* 2001.

no more than earthen dams set across the stream, forming ponds that follow the contours of the steep-sided valley behind them. The top and bottom ponds are relatively small, both being less than 0.1ha (0.2 of an acre) in extent. The bottom dam is particularly badly eroded, having originally been less than 15m (16 yards) long, crossing a point where the valley narrows. Only the ends of this dam survive against the valley wall, although these remnants show that the bank was once relatively high at nearly 1.8m (2 yards). It would appear that the fast current of the stream, combined with the steep gradient, at this point in the valley has breached the dam in the centre, and much of it has been washed away.⁴

The top dam is also much eroded, but here it seems that it has lost height rather than earth from the centre. The dam is less than 1m (1 yard) high although it is slightly longer than the bottom dam, being about 20m (22 yards) in length.

The middle pond was the largest of the three fishponds. The substantial remains of its dam – an earthen bank some 80m (85 yards) wide and 2m (2.1 yards) high – possibly dammed back a pond of 0.2ha ($\frac{1}{2}$ acre) in extent. This dam is of sufficient size that recent attempts have been made to mend the breach with corrugated iron and re-use this pond in some way.

It is worth providing some background to the medieval tenure of Puttenham and Shoelands Farm to help explain the possible origin of these ponds. John de Fay succeeded to his father's land in Puttenham in 1223. It remained temporarily in dower with Ralph de Fay's wife, Beatrix. At John's death it was divided between his two sisters, Maud and Philippa.⁵ In the meantime, according to Dugmore,⁶ land at Shoelands had been granted to the newly founded Augustinian priory of Selborne in Hampshire. In 1251 Peter de Ryvall, a sub-tenant of William of Wintershull, granted a carucate⁷ of land and five shillings rent in Shoelands and Puttenham, to Selborne Priory.⁸ William and his wife subsequently confirmed this grant by an annual rent of a gilded spur. William was lord of Burgham manor; it appears that Shoelands was one of its sub-manors, although it is not known how this connection came about.⁹ The Wintershulls further released the prior's men in Shoelands and Puttenham from view of frankpledge¹⁰, and all claim they had to a road, which led from a close at 'Otteford' before the prior's gate at Shoelands as far as the house of Ralph de Bois. Redstone considers this road was probably the track on the approximate line of Totford Lane leading to the Downs, passing the fishpond earthworks on its east side.

Philippa Neville, one of John de Fay's sisters had given her moiety¹¹ of Puttenham manor, subsequently known as Puttenham Bury, to Beatrice her daughter, the wife of William de Wintershull. The Wintershulls were lords of Bramley manor, and for the next 300 years this part of Puttenham followed the descent of Bramley. The other half of the manor was granted by Maud de Fay to Newark Priory in 1248, with which it remained until the Dissolution. This second manor became known as Puttenham Priory.

Puttenham therefore contained two monastic estates within its boundaries. Little is known about the Newark holding, but the Selborne farm at Shoelands has come down to the present largely unchanged as Shoelands Farm. A piece of deft action allowed the last Selborne farmer at Shoelands, Richard Lusher, to maintain the land in his own hands following the appropriation of Selborne's property by Magdalen College, Oxford in 1484. The priory had

⁴ The breaking of dams can be a dramatic event causing quite large earthworks to be washed away in a relatively short time. Historic treatises recommend the building of diversion channels to take the main force of the flow around the pond to avoid such breaches (Currie 1988b). The apparent absence of such a feature in Hollowbon Copse would inevitably result in a shortened life span for this pond.

⁵ Redstone 1911, 53.

⁶ Dugmore 1972, 13.

⁷ An alternative term for a hide, normally considered the amount of land that could be ploughed in one year for the support of one family. Depending on the quality of the land it could be between 60 and 180 acres.

⁸ Redstone 1911, 55.

⁹ *ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ A view of frankpledge regulated the working of the tithings. By frankpledge each member of the tithing was bound to stand security on the good behaviour of the others.

¹¹ A division of a piece of land or manor was called a moiety, usually a half portion but sometimes less.

fallen on hard times in the later 15th century, and was one of a small number of lesser houses dissolved to endow colleges such as Magdalen around this time.

The deeds granting Shoelands to the priory seem to be missing from the Selborne documents in the Magdalen collection. There are only two references to Shoelands in the Magdalen records. The earliest of these records a return of 1308 from the Dean of Guildford in response to a writ of the bishop of Winchester. This states that the dean had 'solemnly denounced [...] those who had carried off an ox from the manor of the Prior and Convent of Selebourne at Schonlonde'.¹² The only other reference occurs in a return of the priory's revenues and debts made in 1463–4. This states that among their customary annual payments they paid 6d to the 'lord of Burgeham for the manor of Sholand'.¹³

The connection with Selborne has given rise to certain antiquarian speculation about the nature of its holding. Although the original estate seems to have been confined to Puttenham parish, by the post-medieval period lands had been acquired over the parish boundary in Seale.¹⁴ This probably led Money¹⁵ to speculate that the remains of a medieval building at Hopeless Moor (cSU 9095 4765), about 400m west of Shoelands Farm, was monastic in origin. He went further and mistakenly referred to the buildings as being part of a priory rather than a monastic grange.

It is not known whether the reputed medieval buildings found on Hopeless Moor had any connection with the canons of Selborne or their tenants. They might equally have been built by the tenants of the bishop of Winchester, who also had a grange farm and associated buildings in Seale, the exact location of which is not known. The 1208–9 pipe roll of the bishop records repairs to the grange at Seale, and also payments relating to the reeve there and two 'oxherds'.¹⁶ By 1301–2 the Seale grange was leased out and details of activities there are no longer recorded in the pipe rolls.¹⁷

It is possible that an attempt will one day be made to associate the fishpond earthworks in Hollowbon Copse with Selborne. At least one of these fishponds can be shown by the charter cited above to have pre-dated Selborne's acquisitions in Puttenham, although the priory could have added to the ponds in Hollowbon Copse at a later date.

THE PUTTENHAM COMMON PONDS (SU 9110 4628 & SU 9132 4651)

The remains of two ponds can be seen on Puttenham Common. The first, and most westerly, is known as General's Pond (SU 9110 4628). This still holds water behind a dam over 1.5m (1½ yards) high and 100m (110 yards) long. Historically this pond may have covered as much as 2–2.4ha (5–6 acres), although it is less than 0.8ha (2 acres) today because of silting. A second pond dam was discovered about 400m (440 yards) east of the General's Pond dam during the recent fieldwork.

Neither General's Pond nor the earthwork bank above seemed to be made with complex water control systems in mind. Like the ponds at Hollowbon Copse, they appeared to be simple dam banks set at right angles across the valley. The stream that once seems to have fed the upper pond does not appear to flow beyond the limits of General's Pond today, but it is possible that the local water table has been reduced by abstraction.

Particulars of Puttenham Bury and Priory manors, dated c1784, state that there was 'a large fishpond on the common of between five and six acres the head at present is out of repair but [may be] made good at small charge'.¹⁸ This would seem to refer to General's

¹² Macray 1891, 89.

¹³ *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴ SHC: Zs 237.

¹⁵ Money 1943, 117.

¹⁶ Barstow 1998, 87–94.

¹⁷ Page 1996, 206.

¹⁸ SHC: G51/5/69.

Pond. On the parish map of 1765 it is shown as covering only 1ha (2½ acres).¹⁹ The discrepancy between the areas given in these documents may reflect the difference between the actual pond as existing and its original size. The 'head' that was reported as out of repair is clearly the dam, and it is probable that this meant that it was leaking, thereby reducing the potential size of the pond.

The age of General's Pond is not known, but it was fairly common to build fishponds on Surrey commons. These ponds remained the property of the lords of the manor, with the fish they produced being considered high-status food, at least equivalent to venison, until the 19th century.²⁰ The pond here at Puttenham cannot be traced before 1765 with any certainty, but its much shrunken state at that time would suggest that it was older. The name probably derives from General Oglethorpe, who was lord of the manor between 1744 and 1761. The connection should not necessarily suggest that he built the pond, only that he claimed ownership. Historic ponds were generally made to a high standard (eg Frensham Ponds, which have survived for more than 750 years), and for the pond to be in a state of neglect in 1784 would suggest it probably pre-dated Oglethorpe's time by a considerable period.

THE CUTT MILL STREAM PONDS (SU 9141 4549 & SU 9085 4600)

There are currently five large ponds on the Cutt Mill stream between Cutt Mill and Totford Hatch. These have been formed at various times in the last 1000 years or so, although it is thought that those above Cutt Mill Pond itself are only about 200 years old. The pond immediately above Cutt Mill probably began life as a mill pond, but it is debateable whether mills needed such large ponds to operate. In many instances the mill ponds at such sites seem to be larger than required, and this can be explained by the frequency with which millers supplemented their income by also using the mill pond as a fishpond.

Cutt Mill is first mentioned in 1273 when a John le Cutte gave an estate that included a mill to John le Paumer on the marriage of his daughter, Juliana. In 1319 this Juliana gave the mill to Henry le Sigler, the Rector of Puttenham, conceding her claim for 40 shillings.²¹ The Palmer family was associated with Rodsall at the time they obtained rights to the mill. In 1273 William Palmer 'of Rodsall' obtained a lease on a messuage and half a virgate in Puttenham from John, son of William.²²

North of Cutt Mill Pond is a string of four large ponds following the Cutt Mill stream. They have all been formed by placing artificial earth dams across the valley, thus creating four contour ponds. They are not shown on Rocque's map of Surrey c 1770, and were thus made after this date following the creation of Hampton Park in the later 18th century. From south to north they are known as The Tarn (2.7ha/6 acres), Warren Pond (2.7ha/6 acres), Long Pond (2.3ha/5 acres) and Trout Pond (0.9ha/2 acres). There is also a small pond of about ½ acre (0.25ha) between Long and Trout Ponds. The valley above Trout Pond is very marshy, and it is possible this last pond may have once extended further along the valley than at present, the stream almost certainly having brought down much silt since the ponds were first made.

The ponds were created as ornamental waters of the sinuous 'natural' type popular in the later 18th century as part of the designed landscape of Hampton Park. There is some suggestion that they were made by Thomas Parker, following his creation of a country house here soon after 1770.²³ There is also a theory that the famous landscape designer, Humphrey Repton,²⁴ was asked to advise on the embellishment of the estate, but this seems to have been

¹⁹ SHC: 5143/1.

²⁰ Currie 1990.

²¹ Dugmore 1972, 23.

²² Redstone 1911, 55.

²³ Bowden nd.

²⁴ The connection with Repton is discussed in detail in an unpublished essay by Bowden nd.

after the three lower ponds had already been created, and the estate sold to Nathaniel Snell in 1792.²⁵ In this sense these ponds belong to a different tradition than the other ponds discussed here. Fish were clearly kept in them, but it is not known if there was ever any serious intention to manage them as a commercial venture. Angling was considered to be one of the pleasures of 18th and 19th century country house living, and the fish were probably kept in the ponds for sport as much as for food.

There is some evidence to suggest that Trout Pond was added to this series at a later date. This seems to have been in the early 19th century after the estate had come into the hands of the Long family.²⁶

OTHER PUTTENHAM POND SITES

There were a small number of lesser pond sites identified by the ASHLV assessment at Puttenham. Those worthy of note include ponds at Shoelands Farm itself, a pond below the main mill pond at Cutt Mill, and two small ponds on the Little Common.²⁷

According to an estate map of 1793²⁸ there was a set of linear ponds on the west side of Shoelands House (SU 9114 4759). These were of a different type to those discussed so far in that they do not seem to have been built behind dams along the line of a stream. Instead they seem to have been excavated within a damp area capable of holding water, possibly from springs or natural seepage. Such ponds were often of a subsidiary nature. They were often situated close to domestic buildings, and were used as storage ponds from which fish could be taken at short notice. To facilitate rapid capture, they had to be of a relatively small size.

Medieval and early medieval fish management is discussed in detail elsewhere.²⁹ In general the large ponds were those made by damming valley streams. These were known as *vivaria*, the 'live pounds' or 'stews' where the fish were largely left to breed and grow naturally. Roughly every five years these were partially drained down and netted, the larger fish being taken to the 'store' ponds at the domestic site ready for the table. The smaller 'store' ponds were known as *servatoria*, from which the modern word reservoir is derived. Modern dictionaries have confused historic management techniques with those of modern fish farmers. Today fish are bred in the small stew ponds and, when grown, are transferred to larger ponds for sport fishing. Unfortunately modern breeding ponds have been given the name 'stewpond', and modern usage associates a 'stewpond' with the smaller ponds nearer the house. Historically the large ponds were used for breeding, contrary to more recent fish farming methods. Likewise, the term reservoir (*servatorium*) has come to be associated with large man-made bodies of water, the exact opposite to its historic meaning.

Little is known about the Shoelands' ponds as there is little to see today apart from some damp overgrown hollows. There were also two ponds to the east of the house, one of which has been recently restored. Again little can be said about these ponds, as they may not be in their original condition. They may have held fish in historic times, but they may have also served to water stock at the farm.

There is a small pond, known locally as 'The Stew', below the mill pond at Cutt Mill, which is about 0.08ha (0.2 of an acre) in extent (SU 9134 4645). This is retained behind an artificial bank but it is not certain if it is of ancient origin or a 19th century creation. It may have been the '*servatorium*' for the mill. Its situation suggests this is a possibility, although there is no definite evidence for a medieval date.

The final site identified during the ASHLV assessment was a set of two very small ponds

²⁵ Currie *et al* 2001.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Identified by local residents, Angie and Robbie Briggs of Puttenham, during ASHLV fieldwork.

²⁸ SHC: Zs 237.

²⁹ Currie 1988b.

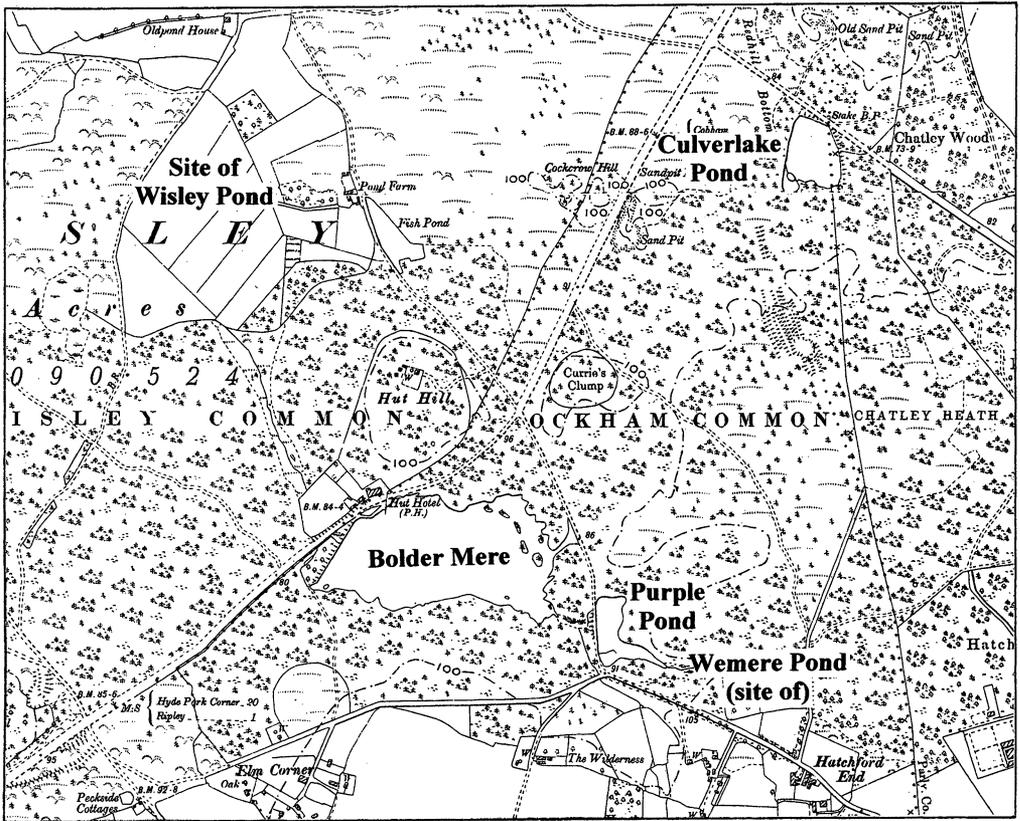


Fig 3 Historic fishponds on Wisley and Ockham Commons from OS 1:10,560 map 1897, reduced to c 1:13,900.

at the head of a steep valley on the Little Common (SU 9185 4750). Neither pond is more than 100m^2 (110 sq yards) the upper pond being the smaller of the two. However, both are set behind small dam banks at right angles to the flow of a small spring at the head of the upper pond. Their construction behind a dam is unlike those usually made to water stock,³⁰ and dammed ponds were usually restricted for fish-keeping or operating mills. The latter is clearly impossible here, but it is unlikely that it would have been worthwhile to keep fish in such tiny out-of-the-way ponds. Consequently one should conclude that they were made to water stock left out on the common. Nevertheless, such a construction technique for a stock-drinking pond is unusual.

Other historic pond sites identified during ASHLV assessments

A number of other historic pond sites were identified during ASHLV assessments elsewhere in the county. It is considered that it would be useful to identify them in this article, and to relate them to the Puttenham examples, and fishponds in Surrey in general. The author carried out ASHLV assessments that located historic pond sites relevant to this study at Wisley/Ockham Commons, Epsom Common, Mickleham Downs and Chobham

³⁰ Stock tends to cause damage to the dam banks, eventually causing them to collapse. Tavener (1600) and North (1713) recommended protecting vulnerable fishpond banks from grazing animals with a hedge.

Common.³¹ Dormor has also carried out an ASHLV assessment on Frensham Common, the site of two well-known medieval fishponds.³² Recently this last-mentioned ASHLV has been looked at in more detail.³³

Too many pond sites were identified during these surveys to allow a detailed discussion of them all to the level of the Puttenham examples, but they are identified by type and incorporated into the overall discussion. A slightly more detailed description is given of the Frensham Ponds because of the extensive medieval records kept for them.

WISLEY/OCKHAM COMMONS (fig 3)

This ASHLV survey included part of Chatley Heath. Six ponds sites relevant to this study were identified.³⁴

Bolder Mere (TQ 0770 5840)

This is a large pond in excess of 6.8 ha (15 acres) in extent still holding water, and standing on the east side of the A3. The old dam runs into the A3, and is probably partly buried under it at its north end. The existing bank is over 70m (75 yards) long and up to 1.8m (2 yards) high. In 1594 William Deacon was recorded as working on the 'great pond head'.³⁵ In the ASHLV assessment the author suggested this may have been repair work rather than work creating the pond. The pond has been associated with iron mills, but this should be treated with caution as the mills shown on Seller's map of 1680 are on the stream below Wisley Pond, not at this site.³⁶

Wisley Pond (TQ 0720 5920)

A massive 23ha (50 acre) pond is shown on Norden's map of 1594. This was drained down to created Wisley Pond Farm in the early 19th century. The dam still survives for a length of 400m (435 yards) and up to 1.7m (1.9 yards) high on the north side. Again it has been associated with iron mills, but these may have been sited on the stream below the pond some time after its construction, and therefore may be a secondary use.

Culverlake (TQ 0838 5920)

A large pond of over 1.8ha (4 acres) in its original extent. It is shown on numerous early maps, and the name 'Culverlake' is mentioned on the 14th century bounds of Ockham in the Chertsey Cartularies.³⁷ The dam or retaining bank of this pond is particularly impressive. Despite being cut through and partly destroyed by the M25 motorway, a large bank over 150m (160 yards) long and up to 1.8m (2 yards) high survives north of the M25.

Purple Pond (TQ 0799 5824)

A modern road seems to follow the line of this pond's dam. Historically it was about 1ha (2½ acres) in extent, formed by damming springs in a damp natural hollow on the common. Again

³¹ Currie 1997; 1999; Currie *et al* 2000; Currie with Taberner 2002.

³² Dormor 1996.

³³ Currie 2003.

³⁴ Currie 1997.

³⁵ SHC: LM 1168.

³⁶ Margary 1974.

³⁷ *Cartularies*: no 949.



Fig 4 Historic fishponds on Epsom Common from Rocque's map of c 1770. The two ponds have recently been re-dug, but the northern pond is not in the original position.

attempts have been made to link this pond with an iron mill, but there is no evidence to support this view. It is mentioned as a fishpond in post-medieval court rolls.³⁸

Wemere (TQ 0842 5810)

A raised track or causeway seems to follow the line of this pond's dam.³⁹ The pond is now much silted, a damp hollow about 60m (65 yards) by 10m (12 yards) being all that currently survives. However, it is shown on historic maps as a pond, and the name 'Wemere' occurs on the 14th century bounds of the manor.⁴⁰

Chatley Wood (TQ 0861 5928)

An impressive dam bank up to 1.6m (1.8 yards) high survives with traces of the pond bed extending over 0.9ha (2 acres). Although this pond is not shown on any historic maps, it is unlikely that such an impressive dam bank was made here in recent times. A pond has been

³⁸ SHC: G165/267/2/2.

³⁹ The use of dams to carry tracks and roads is commonplace. There is frequently some doubt as to whether the dam came before the track or vice-versa. Some cross-valley causeways may not have held ponds behind them. An obvious example of one that does is at Alresford in Hampshire, where the road from London to the medieval town of New Alresford crosses the massive dam of the bishop of Winchester's medieval fishpond.

⁴⁰ *Cartularies*: no 949.

shown on 20th century maps; however, it is possible that it is an old pond that was repaired rather than built from new.

EPSOM COMMON (centred at TQ 184 608; fig 4)

Two dammed ponds existed in historic times on Epsom Common. These have been said to have been of medieval origin, although they have been much altered in recent times. There is a local tradition that they were made by the abbot of Chertsey, but there is no definite evidence to support this. A medieval bounds of the manor mentions a 'Werehull' – weir hill – nearby. A weir is a medieval term sometimes used for a dam. The ponds are first shown on Rocque's map of *c*1770. The lower pond was over 3.6ha (9 acres) in extent.

Today there are two ponds on the common called the 'Stewponds'. The upper pond is almost certainly not on the site of the uppermost of the two historic ponds, but has been re-dug on a new, adjoining site at some time in the 19th century. The 1871 OS 25-inch map names it as 'New Pond', with the larger lower pond then drained down. The dam for the latter seems to have survived, and was re-used when the local authority decided to remake this pond in 1975. The nature of these ponds is therefore much altered, but it would seem that they were constructed on an historic site, and it is reasonable to assume that they fell into the style of the typical Surrey pond built on common land.⁴¹



Fig 5 Historic fishponds in Nower Wood (Mickleham Downs), Headley, from OS 1:10,560 map 1919, reduced to *c* 1:16,600. The three ponds identified are those immediately above and below the label 'Historic fishponds'.

⁴¹ Currie 1999.

MICKLEHAM DOWNS (centred at TQ 196 550; fig 5)

It was not anticipated that artificial historic ponds would be found within this proposed ASHLV, as the landscape comprises mainly chalk downland. However, on the edge of the study area, in Nower Wood, a set of unusual hillside ponds was discovered. Nower Wood had once been common land, but it became private land after 1789 following an agreement between the lord of the manor and local commoners.

The ponds (at least three have been identified) were made by impounding hillside springs behind large retaining banks. The latter are impressive in places, and form a pond type different from those made in valley bottoms, although both types make use of large dam banks to retain the water. The Nower Wood ponds were probably made after 1789 to provide water to a local country house. Nevertheless it is possible that one or more of the ponds was also used to keep fish.⁴²

CHOBHAM COMMON (fig 6)

There are five possible historic pond sites on Chobham Common. Only one can be positively identified as being of medieval construction. This is Gracious Pond (SU 988 640), built by the abbot of Chertsey in the early 14th century.⁴³ It comprises a dammed pond of almost

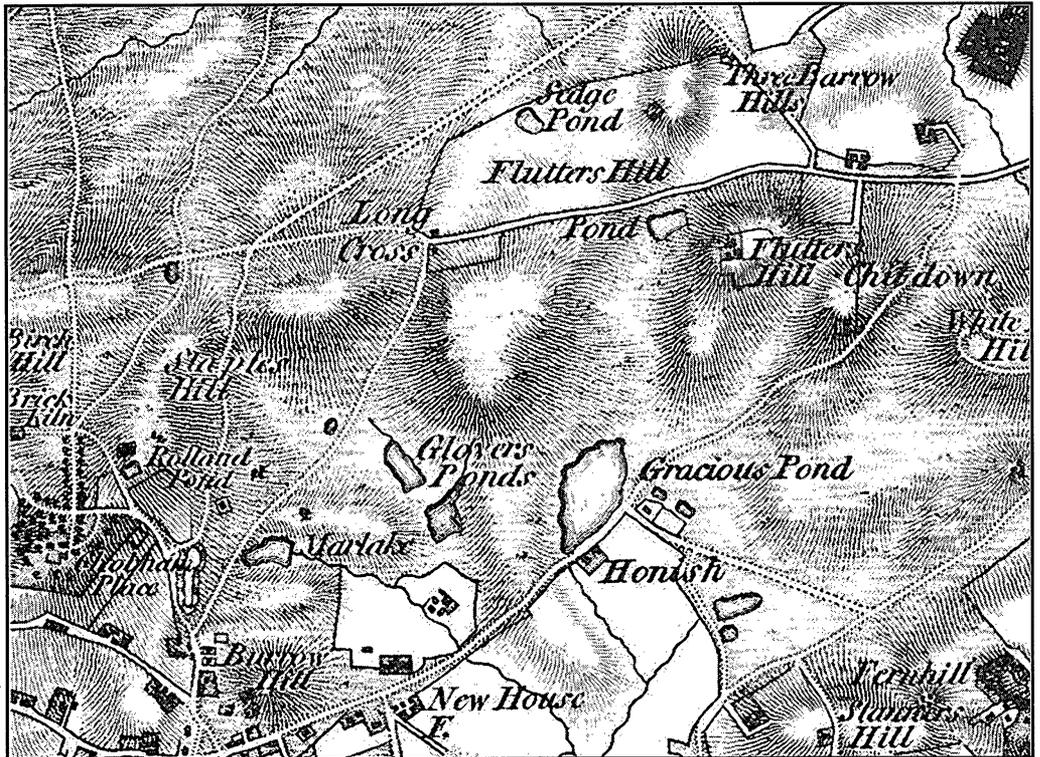


Fig 6 Historic fishponds on Chobham Common from OS 1-inch map 1811. Rolland Pond is now called Round Pond. Marlake (Pond) was the site of a scrapyard until recently. All except Round Pond have now been drained.

⁴² Currie 2000.

⁴³ *Cartularies*: 2, no 767.

23ha (50 acres) in extent. The pond was drained down in the early 19th century. The dam can be seen partly under a modern road to the south of the former pond bed. It is about 100m (110 yards) in length, but only about 1.5m (1.75 yards) high. It takes advantage of a narrowing of the valley bottom, placing the dam across a constricting 'neck' that forms at this point.

All the other ponds on the common were probably of the dammed stream type, but their age is open to question. The two conjectured fishpond sites of Glover's Ponds (SU 981 639) had been converted to arable by the early 19th century. Round Pond (SU 967 641) may have been made as part of the landscape of Chobham Place, and the dammed pond currently leased by Chobham Angling Club known as 'The Fishpond' (SU 994 634) may be of relatively late date. The latter has a particularly small dam, being less than 30m (35 yards) long and barely 1m (1.1 yards) high, with signs of considerable erosion. Despite this it manages to dam back a pond of almost 0.9ha (2 acres).⁴⁴

FRENESHAM COMMON (fig 7)

The two large ponds on Frensham Common, known as the Great (45ha/100 acres; SU 846 402) and Little Ponds (21ha/47 acres; SU 859 415), were part of an extensive system of fishponds operated by the medieval bishops of Winchester on their various estates in southern

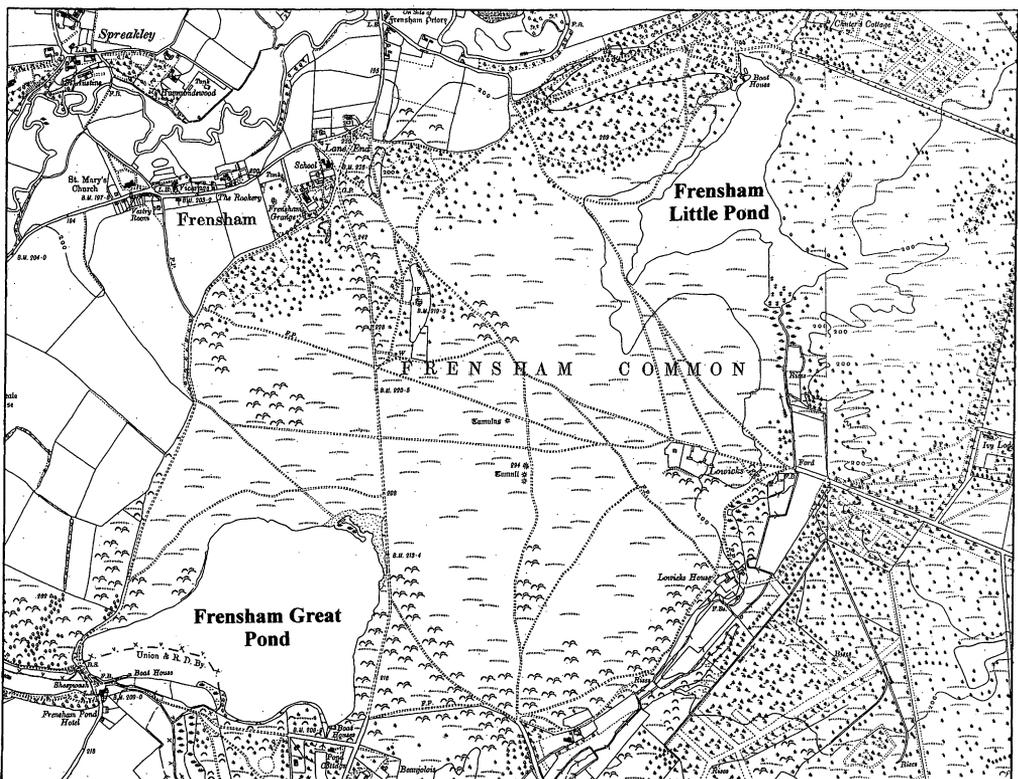


Fig 7 Historic fishponds on Frensham Common from OS 1:10,560 map 1920, reduced to 1:23,000.

⁴⁴ Currie 2002.

England.⁴⁵ There is copious information on their mode of management in the bishop of Winchester's pipe rolls in the Hampshire Record Office. Frensham Great Pond is first mentioned in the second extant roll (1210–11), when the bishop's itinerant fishermen spent four days there fishing.⁴⁶ Thereafter, it would seem that medieval management required the ponds to be drained down and fished approximately every five years.⁴⁷

The exact date of the creation of the ponds is a matter of debate. This is particularly the case for the Little Pond, which Robo⁴⁸ claims was made in 1245–6, following a dispute between the bishop and his tenants over the carting of stone to build the dam there. Since then there has been some discussion as to whether this reference refers to the making of a new pond or the repair of an old one.⁴⁹ Recent fieldwork has confused the issue further by suggesting the possibility that the Little Pond was once two fishponds with two separate dams (discussed below).

Regardless of the outcome of this matter, the Great Pond existed in 1210–11 and it is likely that it was an old pond even then. In 1171–2 the king took the bishop's fishponds into his own hands during an episcopal vacancy following the death of Henry de Blois, bishop from 1129 until 1171.⁵⁰ That these ponds were considered great wonders of their age is recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerald of Wales (*c*1146–1223), who praised de Blois *c*1198 for having created huge ponds and 'difficult water courses' (*ductur aquarum difficiles*).⁵¹ It would appear, therefore, that de Blois had been responsible for building large ponds with complex water supply systems. The latter has been identified by the author⁵² as being one of the outstanding characteristics of medieval ponds, being given the generic term 'diversion channels' to explain their main function in enabling the ponds to be easily drained down to perform management tasks and facilitate fish catching. It is possible that Frensham Great Pond was one of these ponds on the account of its characteristic water control system. More recently, excavations at the bishop's palace of Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire have led to the suggestion that the pond at that site existed before de Blois' phase of works.⁵³ This latter discovery introduces the possibility that some of the bishop's ponds may have been built before 1129, suggesting that earlier Norman bishops had been active in this field.

The complexity of the fishponds is confirmed in the bishop's pipe rolls. The management of the bishop's ponds has been discussed in more detail elsewhere.⁵⁴ Their construction method enabled control of the water entering the ponds in such a manner that they could be drained down every five years or so to allow the fish to be sorted, and allowed management tasks such as silt removal and sluice repair and renewal to be undertaken. This method continued into the 19th century when it was described by Baker & Minchin⁵⁵:

From the opening of the Penstock [the sluice] it took about six weeks for the Pond to be sufficiently drained for the actual fishing to begin. Before this [...] a structure consisting of four upright posts about eight feet high with a crossbar at the top, from which two large wooden scoops were suspended, was erected [...] When the water ceased to flow by gravitation [...] these scoops were worked by relays of men, who continued bailing until the completion of the fishing [...] By the day of the fishing, a small area of mud and water under the dam [...] had become a

⁴⁵ Roberts 1986.

⁴⁶ Holt 1964, 41.

⁴⁷ Roberts 1986, 132; Currie 1988b.

⁴⁸ Robo 1935, 23.

⁴⁹ Roberts 1986, 136.

⁵⁰ Pipe Rolls: 18 Henry II, 86.

⁵¹ Dimock 1877, 46.

⁵² Currie 1988a.

⁵³ Lewis 1985, 89; Currie 1988b, 118.

⁵⁴ Roberts 1986; Currie 1988a; 1988b.

⁵⁵ Baker & Minchin 1938, 20–1.

seething mass of fish; men provided with landing nets and baskets waded into the mud and scooped up the helpless prey. They were brought ashore, where farm carts were waiting to take them to the stew-ponds. There they were sorted ...

The bishop's pipe rolls record that in the medieval period the pond dam was broken, usually in the 'bay' containing the wooden sluice. After draining, the sluice bay was replaced anew, something that may have ceased by the 19th century, when a more permanent brick and iron sluice was constructed. Thus was the pond at Frensham drained down for fishing in 1236–7 supervised by 'Master Ralph the fisherman'.⁵⁶ In 1282–3 clay and timber were carted to the head of the Great Pond, where there was a 'water-leap' connected to the sluice that was in need of repair.⁵⁷ This 'water-leap' may have been the waterfall created where the water flows out of the pond. Both the Great and Little Ponds have such features today. Brooks⁵⁸ considers that there were salting houses at the ponds based on the use of the term *saltatoria* in the accounts, but there is no documented evidence for preserving freshwater fish in this way. In fact, the whole purpose of freshwater ponds at that time was to supply fresh fish as a high-status food for special occasions.⁵⁹ Roberts suggests that the *saltatoria* is not a salting house, but a 'water-leap' based on the translation given by Latham.⁶⁰

A number of items were made at the ponds to help catch fish. It is recorded that 'engines' (*ingenia*) were made for this purpose and that hurdles were placed across the breached dam. This allowed the water to escape but stopped the fish being washed away in the process. These hurdles were attached to the 'engine' and strengthened with iron bands.⁶¹ In 1251–2 and again in 1299–1300 a 'fish wych' was made by a carpenter. This is thought to have been a fish box, a perforated wooden box that was lowered into the water to retain the fish. The perforations were made so as to allow the water in but prevent the fish from escaping. A traveller in Germany in the 1630s records seeing them there:

in this village, on the back side of which runs the Rhine, I observed a chest bored full of holes, locked, which was placed in a dock prepared for it, which was with a pulley to be drawn out and let dry, herein were fish kept, to be always ready on sudden occasion to be taken, the ark being dry and empty of water; for this end I saw also twiggen round baskets at Hage to keep living fish in, hanging in the water, to be drawn out at pleasure.⁶²

During the 13th century, the English kings were particularly keen on fishponds. Henry III (1216–72) kept extensive ponds on his royal estates, and huge numbers of bream and pike⁶³ were taken from them for the annual great feasts he gave in celebration of the feast of his favourite saint, Edward the Confessor. He also gave fish from his ponds as gifts to favoured nobles. It is therefore not unexpected to find that the kings took a great interest in the bishop's ponds whenever the See fell vacant. During these vacancies, the king made good use of the ponds, taking fish from them for his own use. Thus in 1243 the king sent to Alresford and Frensham Ponds for fish on a daily basis while he was resident at Windsor.⁶⁴ In 1264 Simon de Montfort, having captured the king at the battle of Lewes, seems to have claimed royal

⁵⁶ Roberts 1986, 132.

⁵⁷ HRO: Eccl 159305.

⁵⁸ Brooks & Graham 1983, 109.

⁵⁹ Currie 1989.

⁶⁰ Roberts 1986, 127; Latham 1965, 417.

⁶¹ HRO: Eccl 159318.

⁶² Bereton 1844, 45.

⁶³ Carp do not seem to have been introduced into England until the later medieval period. Ponds are recorded as being stocked with them from the 15th century, and they are recorded at Frensham in the 16th century. For information on the introduction of carp to the UK see Currie 1991.

⁶⁴ CalLR: 1240–45, 204.

privilege by having Frensham Pond fished for one week in preparation for the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.⁶⁵ This situation was not always one-sided. In October 1246 the king sent the bishop of Winchester ten bream and ten pike from the nearby royal pond at Woolmer, Hampshire, for stocking at Frensham.⁶⁶ These were likely to have been breeding stock, possibly showing that meeting the king's requirements in 1243 had so depleted the stock of mature fish capable of breeding that the situation needed to be remedied.

It is not always clear which pond is referred to in the accounts, as a distinction was not always made between the Great and Little Ponds. The term 'Great Pond' was frequently used on medieval fishpond sites to distinguish the largest pond of a complex, but when the term 'pond' is used on its own it is not clear which pond was referred to. Soon after the dispute of 1246 there are references to a 'new' pond at Frensham,⁶⁷ which is interpreted as the Little Pond. Fieldwork connected with this study, however, has shown that the Little Pond was once two ponds, with the south-east arm once forming a separate pond until the dam was breached at an unknown time. It is possible that this 'new' pond refers to the pond in the south-east arm leaving the main body of the Little Pond as a pond of some antiquity even then.⁶⁸

The cycle of fishing and repairs continued throughout the 13th and early 14th centuries. In 1301–2 £29 6s 8d was spent 'wholly renewing the head of the small fishpond', men were hired to collect fish which had escaped from the 'great fishpond', and to clean out the 'small ditch' at the Great Pond.⁶⁹ Expenditure on the ponds was recorded at various dates between 1305–6 and 1352–3,⁷⁰ but thereafter such references become rarer. This may have been the result of decreasing interest in direct farming following the decline of demesne farming in the later 14th and 15th centuries. Nevertheless, references are made from time to time as in 1416–17 when extensive repairs are undertaken to the dam at Frensham, with large stones being brought for that purpose from a quarry at Barford.⁷¹

By the 16th century at the latest the ponds seem to have been permanently leased, often with the southern chase of Farnham, but sometimes separately. During this period the fishing rights appear to have been let to the Mores of Loseley, but by the 19th century the lease of the fishing seems to have been in the hands of the tenant of the inn that then stood close to the southern end of the dam bank of the Great Pond. Baker & Minchin record that the last traditional fishing carried out by breaking the dam and draining the pond was carried out in 1885, three years before the Ecclesiastical Commissioners sold the ponds to the Combes of Pierrepont.⁷²

Discussion

The majority of the ponds identified here seem to have been created primarily as fishponds. Even where other purposes were probably intended, such as at Nower Wood, the construction methods were similar. In a previous study of English medieval fishponds, this author has identified highly complex techniques of water management, and the ability to create stable dams with a long life span when compared with the dams of more recent ornamental lakes and ponds.⁷³ One of the characteristics of the Surrey ponds described here is the absence of

⁶⁵ HRO: Eccl 159295.

⁶⁶ Close Rolls: 1242–47, 464.

⁶⁷ In 1248 13s 4d was spent on the 'new' fishpond at Frensham (HRO: Eccl 159290).

⁶⁸ It is possible that the south-east arm is the older pond, with the main body being of later date. Another possibility is that the dam in the south-east arm was abandoned in 1246 when a decision was taken to turn the two ponds into one large pond, thus ensuring that at no time did the two ponds exist simultaneously.

⁶⁹ Page 1996, 214.

⁷⁰ 1305–6 (HRO: Eccl 159321); 1317–18 (HRO: Eccl 159332); 1324–5 (HRO: Eccl 159337); 1342–3 (HRO: Eccl 159353), and 1352–3 (HRO: Eccl 159363).

⁷¹ HRO: Eccl 159419.

⁷² Baker & Minchin 1948, 19.

⁷³ Currie 1988b.

some of the more evolved water management techniques that have been found elsewhere. Even in the adjoining county of Hampshire, the complexity of the water engineering undertaken by the bishops of Winchester is in contrast to most of the Surrey ponds described in this paper.

A number of characteristics can be identified at the Surrey sites. The first of these appears to be the lack of diversion leats that enabled so many Hampshire ponds to be drained down for more effective management tasks such as netting the fish and making repairs to sluices and banks.⁷⁴ Another is the frequency with which ponds of very considerable size were sited on manorial commons.⁷⁵

It is possible that the two points may be related. Historic treatises warned pond builders of the considerable damage that could be caused to fishponds by encroaching stock.⁷⁶ The hooves of animals tend to sink into the banks, causing them to weaken, and eventually to break if not controlled. The treatises urged fishpond owners to enclose their vulnerable banks and leats with hedges to keep stock at bay. It is possible that this was often impractical on manorial commons, where stock grazing was one of the commoners' most important rights. To enclose the pond may have been seen as taking the land out of the common and creating an 'enclosure'. It is possible that some lords may have felt it impolitic to do this, and so settled for making ponds without diversion leats so that there would be less of a problem if stock had access to the banks.

The situation regarding the presence of possible diversion channels at the Frensham Ponds is complex. The Great Pond is fed by two separate streams, known as the Silverbeck and Hindhead streams. According to Baker & Minchin⁷⁷ only the westerly stream was provided with a diversion channel. Recent fieldwork has shown that this opinion may have been based on 19th century evidence. Evidence on the ground suggests that the eastern stream was also capable of diversion, but the diversion channel had fallen out of use by Baker & Minchin's time. Of the Little Pond, recent work has suggested there were once two ponds here, a smaller upper pond and a larger lower pond. Recent dredging work on the site of the conjectured lower pond has obscured the evidence for any diversion channels on the east side, where a channel might be expected.⁷⁸ Baker & Minchin⁷⁹ also suggest that the Great Pond was at least partly enclosed behind a hedge as the bishop's pipe rolls record expenditure on making one in 1231–2, although there is little trace of it today. Thus it can be seen that the Frensham Ponds may not have been exactly similar to other Surrey heath ponds, in that they seem to exhibit characteristics of both Hampshire and Surrey county traditions.

It is possible that the great extent of common land on many Surrey manors was a factor. Although many Hampshire lords were prepared to flood private land, some of it of high quality, to make ponds,⁸⁰ the lords of those Surrey manors that lay on sandy soils seemed to prefer to site their larger ponds on the poorer land of the commons. Even the bishop of Winchester seems to have deferred to the divide between the counties, building all his Hampshire ponds on private demesne land, while in Surrey his ponds supplying the Farnham

⁷⁴ Currie 1988a. These diversion streams also allowed the streams to be diverted around the ponds in winter when dissolved oxygen levels are naturally high, thus preventing vast quantities of silt brought down by winter floods from being deposited on the pond bottom. The ability to do this not only increased the life of the pond, but also ensured that when desilting was required it could be undertaken more easily (by draining the pond) and would be less onerous than on ponds without these features.

⁷⁵ Although the pond was located on the common, it should be made quite clear that the tenants had no common rights therein. They remained in the exclusive ownership of the lord of the manor, and their produce belonged to that lord. Only if the pond was leased could the tenantry obtain access to the produce of the pond.

⁷⁶ Taverner 1600; North 1713.

⁷⁷ Baker & Minchin, 1938, 14.

⁷⁸ Currie 2003. This dredging has resulted in a bank being built along the east bank with a wet ditch behind. Until the author was told this had been recently created, it looked very much like a diversion channel. However, one cannot be certain that this feature does not obscure a similar earlier bank.

⁷⁹ Baker & Minchin 1938, 18.

⁸⁰ Currie 1988a; 1988b.

palace were located on Frensham Common.⁸¹ This seems to be very much the case on the manors examined in this study. At places like Chobham, Ockham and Wisley, good land may have been in short supply. The lords here may not have been prepared to waste good resources when poorer land was available to make ponds.⁸² It is possible that the Surrey heath ponds were less fertile than their counterparts on private land, but it would seem that the status of having fishponds was more important to the medieval lord than their return.⁸³

There are cases where Surrey landowners have clearly chosen to build fishponds on private land. Those at Hollowbon Copse in Puttenham are the best examples found during ASHLV assessments. This site is quite interesting, as it appears to be an early site based on our present knowledge of Surrey fishponds, already existing by 1210. The creation of Gracious Pond on Chobham Common is notable for being made at an apparently late date for a medieval fishpond (ie after 1300). This might suggest that many of the fishponds sited on commons were made relatively late in the main phase of fishpond building. However, this example is possibly an exception as the great majority of the medieval fishponds were made between 1066 and 1300.⁸⁴

Previous research by the author has shown that many of the traditions associated with medieval fishponds were antiquarian myths. The ponds were originally made to supply a high-status food for special occasions, not for Lent as popularly believed. It can also be shown that monks were not the pioneering fishpond builders they were once thought to be. A study of the known early ponds (that is pre-1200) in England has shown that most were made by wealthy laymen, and subsequently granted to monasteries. Some of these grants specifically forbade the monks from using the fish at Lent, and insisted that they were only used on special feast days and when important guests were visiting. These traditions were introduced by the Normans, and the author has shown how the high status associated with fish was passed from the Roman Empire to the lands of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire, and thence to England with the Normans. The Anglo-Saxons seem to have had no special regard for fish, and fishponds were rare in England before 1066. The Normans began building them almost immediately, seemingly making them even more ubiquitous than the castle motte. As early as 1067 the Conqueror had dammed the Fosse at York to make the royal pond there that is so well documented in subsequent medieval royal records.⁸⁵

Although the high status associated with fishponds in the medieval period made lords unwilling to lease them out, by the 15th century some appear to have done so.⁸⁶ The later medieval leasing of ponds eroded their high status, making them available to the lord's tenantry. This, in turn, led to a decrease in their popularity, so bemoaned by Taverner.⁸⁷ However, pond fish were still of sufficient worth for Roger North to consider them one of the badges of wealth and status in 1713. They are, he wrote 'a Dish as acceptable as any you can purchase for Money [...] which, from the Country-man to the King, is well taken [...] it is a positive disgrace to appear covetous of them, rather more than Venison, or any other thing; so that Presents are not only expedient, but necessary to be made by him that professeth a Mastery of fish'.⁸⁸

A further point about Surrey fishponds that has emerged from the ASHLV surveys is their often purported relationship with iron mills, particularly in the Wisley area. This might suggest reluctance by antiquarians to recognize that large ponds were made in the past simply for the purposes of keeping fish and enhancing the manorial lord's status. Instead they preferred

⁸¹ Roberts 1986.

⁸² Equally poor soils can be found in the Hampshire Basin, the New Forest being a massive 'common' of mainly sandy soils, yet fishponds were not generally built on the extensive commons in that part of the county.

⁸³ Currie 1989.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Roberts 1966.

⁸⁷ Taverner 1600.

⁸⁸ North 1713, 67.

to think that such large flooded areas only made sense if related to an iron mill. It is probable that many of these postulated iron mills did not exist. Even where they did, as below Wisley Pond, they may have been short-lived enterprises that could have utilized an existing fishpond. There is certainly no good evidence to support the idea that Bolder Mere and Purple Pond were connected with ironworking, and it would appear that they were made as fishponds. It would seem therefore that many of the county's ponds that have been traditionally assigned to powering iron mills need to be looked at more critically.

Another characteristic of the sample examined seems to suggest that dam construction techniques used on many Surrey heathland ponds may have been relatively unsophisticated. The dams examined in this paper often seem to be small in size when compared to the area flooded. For example, both Gracious and Wisley Ponds were able to dam back areas of over 23ha (50 acres) with relatively low banks barely 1.5m (1.7 yards) in height. To dam back a similar area, the Great Pond at Marwell, Hampshire, needed to be over 3m (3½ yards) high. The dam at Alresford, Hampshire, is similarly massive, yet more water could be impounded in Surrey heath ponds within much lesser earthworks. Only Frensham Great Pond dam is of any great height, although its length is relatively short as it occupies a position where the valley narrows considerably.

This clearly relates to the shallow nature of the valleys utilized on Surrey manorial commons. Wisley and Gracious Ponds were clearly formed in large shallow depressions that occurred naturally, whereas ponds on private land tend to be formed within valleys with much steeper sides, as at Hollowbon Copse. This would suggest that the Surrey heath ponds were often located in areas that were naturally damp and low lying, indicating that even within the common, the poorest land for grazing was selected. This was not always the case elsewhere in England, where the lord was often prepared to sacrifice good meadowland, some of the most valuable land available, to make a pond.

Many of the examples of Surrey heath ponds showed considerable evidence for erosion to the dams. The location on land formerly heavily grazed by stock might have helped to cause this damage. Another factor is the composition of the bank itself. Although the banks may have had clay cores much of the upper soils could have been taken from the surrounding sandy heath. This certainly seems to be the case at Wisley, where there is evidence of a considerable amount of sandy soil in the upper layers of the dam, although it is uncertain how far into the bank this extends.

Despite the appearance that the dams of Surrey heath ponds were poorly made,⁸⁹ they seem to have had a relatively long life. Admittedly Wisley and Gracious Ponds had vanished by the early 19th century, whereas many of the bishop of Winchester's fishponds still function today, but this might be more to do with individual landlords' ability to sustain high levels of maintenance. Both Wisley and Gracious Ponds were deliberately drained down, rather than breached by natural causes. One cannot be certain if the owners simply had better use for the land or if the ponds were in such a poor state that they were no longer worth maintaining.

Conclusions

This study has shown that a significant proportion of medieval fishponds in Surrey were located on manorial commons, a characteristic not generally noted in neighbouring counties. This seems to be particularly the case in areas where the manor contained significant areas of sandy soil. Although it is not possible to be certain why this phenomenon arose, it is possible that Surrey lords, unlike their counterparts elsewhere, were not prepared to waste more valuable private land on fishponds. This may have been related to a greater scarcity of good

⁸⁹ Two examples of fishponds excavated by the author on private land at Titchfield Abbey and Southwick Priory, both in Hampshire, were made to a very high standard (Currie 1985; 1990).

land in the parts of Surrey studied. Initial assessment suggests that there is often a lack of the complex diversion channels and leats on Surrey ponds that can be found on many sites on private land elsewhere in England. Surrey pond dams on common land also seem to be subject to more erosion, either through poorer construction in the first place, or because of the more friable soils used.

This article has identified some provisional information about historic fishponds in Surrey, but much more needs to be done to determine whether these patterns are widespread. The county remains one of the few areas in lowland England that has not had its fishponds examined systematically.⁹⁰ Such a survey would make a highly suitable project to be carried out by those working on a voluntary basis. This preliminary work has shown that there is considerable potential for the study of historic fishponds in the county, and further work is urged. In particular, the earthworks of some of the sites discussed here might be subject to accurate measurement so that more precise comparisons can be made in future.

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⁹⁰ Roberts 1966; Steane 1970; Aston 1988.

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