

Early water management on the lower River Itchen in Hampshire

Summary

Fieldwork connected with the study of Saxon charter bounds for South Stoneham has located the remains of a substantial water channel between Gater's Mill and Woodmill on the River Itchen. They relate closely to the conjectured position of a feature called the 'new river' (*niwen ea*) on the charter for 1045. This has been much altered in post-medieval times, but the possibility that this channel may be the remains of the feature mentioned in the Saxon charter is considered. The evidence is assessed in relationship to the on-going controversy over the reputed existence of a medieval canal to Winchester. Although it seems unlikely there was a medieval navigation to Winchester, vague memories of partial navigation on the lower reaches of the Itchen in the Late Saxon period may have been responsible for the legend arising. Evidence for early navigation as far as the bishop's manor at Bishopstoke is considered.

The charter evidence

A full analysis of the bounds of the charters relevant to this study is given in Currie (1995), to which readers are referred. This present work follows this study, but restricts itself to discussing only the passages in the charters directly related to the presence of a 'new river'.

The earliest charter for South Stoneham dates from 990 x 992, and records a grant of land to an unnamed party by King Ethelred (Sawyer 942, Kemble 712). The bounds of this estate appear to cover roughly the same area as the later charter of 1045. It is this later charter that mentions the 'new river'. This is not given in the earlier charter. Instead the bounds start on the Itchen, and move along the king's boundary to the Bitch's Pole. From here they move on to 'Wadda's Stake'. On the charter for 1045 the same apparent land is granted by King Edward to the Old Minster at Winchester (Sawyer 1012, Kemble 776). The bounds here start at Swaythling, and probably move down the contemporary equivalent of the Mansbridge Road to the Itchen¹. The first mention of the river in 1045 refers to the 'Old Itchen' (Ealden Icenan). From here, it moves along the top of an orchard² to the 'New River' (Niwan Ea), then along the boundary to the 'claypits' (Lampyttas), and along the boundary again until it comes to 'Wadda's Stake'. The 'boundary' referred to is probably the undefined 'king's boundary' of the first charter, showing that the boundary itself does not appear to have changed, but that three extra points have sprung up between the original 'Itchen' and 'Wadda's Stake'.

Although it is possible that the second charter is elaborating on the first by giving extra bounds, it is also possible that the additions have been made because the landscape between the original points had changed. The local topography is such that it is less likely that a change in the boundary was the cause of the additional points. It is possible therefore that the 'new river' may not have existed in 990 x 992, but had come into being by 1045, rather than the boundary had changed.

The same argument can be made for the appearance of the 'claypits' on the second charter, and the disappearance of the 'Bitch's Pole' mentioned on the first. It is possible that the clay pits have been dug in relation to the making of the new river to

provide clay for banking, or some other functional task. In digging them, the feature, the Bitch's Pole' may have been removed. It is noteworthy that the copse to the immediate south (the direction in which the charter bounds are moving) of the recently identified channel is known as Marlhill Copse; 'marl' being a term used for earth dug out of the ground as a fertiliser. This name was probably given to explain the existence of pits in the area, and they may have subsequently been used for agricultural purposes. The hill was known as 'Malhull' or Marlhill as early as 1333 (Himsworth 1984, no. 1592).

The 1045 charter gives a list of other features after the bounds. These probably belong to the estate of South Stoneham, but for reasons not given fall outside the bounds. Three of these features appear to be associated with the Itchen. They are 'an eyot at Port's bridge' (*se iggath aet Portes Bricge*), 'half a sea weir' (*healfe saewaere*), and 'the millstead at Mansbridge' (*se mylnstede aet Mannaes Bricge*). Both the terms 'Port's bridge' and 'Mansbridge' suggest bridges over the river at these points. The latter still exists today as an eighteenth-century stone bridge over which the Mansbridge Road passes, and was probably in existence by the tenth century (Currie 1995). The 'eyot' at Port's bridge is possibly the island, shown in the tidal portion of the river on the 1810 one inch Ordnance Survey map, opposite the site of Roman Bitterne.

'Half the sea weir' is problematic. Initially this seems to be a reference to the well-recorded fishery at Woodmill, at the head of the tidal portion of the Itchen. Reference to two fisheries in South Stoneham in the Domesday Survey has been given as evidence for the probable existence of this fishery by 1066 (Grundy 1908, 481). However, a reference in a mid-fifteenth-century *Inspeximus* to 'half a weir and half a crossing over the Itchen...' at Bitterne (Greatrex 1978, 80) hints that a fish weir may have existed between the island in the river and the mainland at Bitterne. Although it is not possible to equate this later reference with that on the charter, the similarity in both descriptions argues that the possibility of these locations being the same needs to be considered³.

The identification of the 'mill at Mansbridge' is not clear cut either. The initial impression that Mansbridge mill may be Gater's Mill is called into question by the mention of a mill at 'North Mansbridge' on a charter for North Stoneham dated 932 (Sawyer 418, Birch 692) in which King Athelstan granted the estate to a man named Alfred.

This latter mill is recorded after the bounds, and is probably referring to Gater's Mill. The boundary for this estate comes very close to this mill site, but does not include it. It is thought that the lands given after the bounds on this charter are those between the boundary for South Stoneham given in 1045 (approximately the modern Mansbridge Road) and the 1810 parish boundary for North Stoneham (Currie 1995, 110). Therefore, like the lands given after the bounds of the 1045 South Stoneham charter, these are lands that come with the estate, but fall outside the bounds. Currie (*ibid.*) argues that this suggests that Gater's Mill had been the mill for the joint estate of North and South Stoneham before it was divided, probably in the later Middle Saxon period. This suggests that Gater's Mill may be an earlier mill than that at Woodmill. It is possible that the mill mentioned at 'Mansbridge' on the 1045 charter may be a more recently built mill than that at 'North Mansbridge', and might be equated with that at

Woodmill. Alternatively, the descriptive 'North' has merely been dropped, and both charters refer to the same mill.

The present remains

As late as 1940 the 25 inch Ordnance Survey map (sheet LXV.3) showed a substantial channel heading ESE from Woodmill to the southern corner of Riverside Park. This channel was parallel to the substantial levee bank that then followed the course of the river up to its upper tidal limits. These banks could have been a medieval or earlier creation to prevent the flooding of adjoining fields. The fields of the lower Itchen have probably always been highly prone to this, especially when high spring tides coincide with periods of heavy flow. This has remained a problem in the area until recent memory. That a levee bank should have reached some 250m beyond Woodmill to the junction of Woodmill Lane with Manor Road indicates the substantial size of the channel it once followed (OS 25" sheet LXV.3, editions 1865, 1897, 1910 etc).

This channel may have been part of the remains of the 'new river' mentioned in 1045. Its physical remains demonstrate that it was equal in width to the main river. It has been gradually backfilled over the period 1940-75. It is still marked today by a substantial hollow along the edge of Woodmill Lane, with a bank to the south, up to 1.2m high, representing the former levee. Near its junction with Manor Road, Woodmill Lane seems to cut across the line of the channel and levee bank. This lane has all the appearances of having been an old routeway from South Stoneham to Bitterne, and may have medieval or earlier origins. Its present course seems to date from the period after the 'new river' had fallen into disuse.

On the east side of Woodmill Lane (SU 4421 1505), the present line of the channel is continued by a broad hollow up to 15m wide. At the bottom of this hollow is a small stream, representing the local catchment of water flowing off Town Hill. Ordnance Survey 25" maps of the area appear to show that this stream was cut between 1910 and 1933, although the physical remains of what appears to be the edge of an earlier, wider, silted channel are visible to the south-east of this stream. It is possible that this scarp visible here represents a continuation of the levee bank clearly shown further west on early 25" OS maps of the area. This situation continues until the conjectured alignment is crossed by a bridge leading into Riverside Park at SU 4456 1529. Stonework in the side of the

bank adjacent to this structure has tool markings characteristic of c. 1840 on it (Bob Thompson pers. comm.).

The situation here is complicated by the fact that the original surveyor's 2" drawing of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey one inch map seems to show the channel taking a more direct route to join up with the channel on the other side of Woodmill Lane (HRO Original Surveyors Drawing, sheet 12, 1808). If so, this channel would have been buried beneath recent dumping for the present golf course. However, its form had almost certainly been changed by the time of the tithe map for South Stoneham of c. 1845, as this map shows the channel paralleling the large bend in the main river. It does not do this on the 1808 drawing. By the first edition of the 25" OS map in 1865-66, this situation had changed further, the original channel being replaced by a series of narrower ditches. Although it might be argued that the scale could result in error, the 1808 map shows the decided widening of the channel at exactly the same spot as on the tithe map. As the 1808 drawing

corresponds in accuracy with many other features shown on the tithe map, there is no reason to suggest it is wrong in this case.

It would seem therefore that the channel may have been lost between Woodmill Lane and this bridge. Alternatively, the channel shown in 1808 and later no longer followed the original line, and the scarp edge that the more recent stream now follows is the remains of the earlier channel. It would be very difficult to prove this case either way any longer.

Continuing NE from the bridge, the channel becomes increasing overgrown and stagnant as it follows the base of the slope of the steep-sided hill along the edge of Marlhill Copse. The channel here is up to 15-20m wide depending on the extent of silting and other natural factors. There are many fallen trees and alder and willow scrub in the channel as far as SU 4576 1545, about 750m from the above mentioned bridge, when the channel turns north towards Gater's Mill, leaving the edge of Marlhill Copse.

At a point approximately SU 4475 1542 on the south side of the channel is an earthwork bank, up to 1.5m high and about 10m across its base. Cut into the hillside between the bank and the hill is a ditch, up to 1.5m deep. This is about 100m in length, although its extent has not been accurately measured. It enters the main channel by cutting across the bank at right angles. It follows parallel to the main channel, and terminates abruptly in a dead end. There is currently no drainage flowing into it from the hill, and no immediate explanation for its existence. It may be contemporary with the main channel, or a subsequent feature.

After the channel has left Riverside Park to continue eastwards through a scrubby piece of former meadow, the remnants of an old hedgeline follow the line of the channel on its north side. This stands on a very degenerate bank, but there is no trace of a ditch. This hedge appears to stand some five metres or so north of the conjectured line of the north bank of the channel, as if leaving a deliberate gap between itself and the channel. Whether this was a walk alongside an ornamental pond, a possible towpath, or feature unknown has yet to be tested. The tithe map marks a short section of it as 'pathway' (HRO 21M65 F7/217/1-2), but it completely isolated at both ends, and seems to have been the remnants of a relict feature even then. The present footpath does not respect the hedgeline, and cuts across it on a number of occasions.

The channel itself is probably in its best condition on this stretch, is 15m or more wide in places. It is marked on the tithe map as a long thin 'Lake' of about 3.2 acres, and owned by Edward Gater, the lessee of Gater's Mill. Although it is possible that this explains the origin of the water course as an ornamental feature or fishpond, there is reasonably good documentary and physical evidence to suggest that an earlier channel had existed on this alignment⁴.

Just before the main channel reaches the main Mansbridge Road near Gater's Mill, it narrows suddenly, and is crossed by a trackway crossing a concrete pipe (SU 4524 1552). This feature seems to mark a short section of modern infill between the track and the modern road just below Gater's Mill millpool. A reasonably substantial ditch was shown here when the Ordnance Survey last mapped this area in 1967 (25 inch edition, plan SU 4515), suggesting this infilling has probably occurred since that date. In 1845 the channel extended right up to the old road.

Today there are two river channels at Gater's Mill. Currently that on the west or left takes the main River Itchen around Gater's Mill, whilst a second, eastern, channel passes through the mill. As will be shown below, this situation was radically different in the medieval period.

Saxon river engineering

Recent work at Glastonbury, Somerset, has uncovered evidence for a Saxon 'canal' there dating from the tenth century, possibly used for transporting stone and other materials to the site of the abbey (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1991). From the number of mills recorded in Domesday, the Saxons must have undertaken a large amount of river engineering before the Norman Conquest. At nearby Titchfield there is a long artificial leat, nearly 800m long, feeding the existing village mill. If this mill can be assumed to be on the site of that mentioned in Domesday, then this artificial watercourse is one of a number of suspected Saxon date that suggests that they were involved with major river alterations. This suggestion is supported by a reference in a charter of 948 (Sawyer 1968, 535) for the estate of Segensworth (later in Titchfield) which refers to a meadow that lies between 'the Meon and the mill ditch' (Hare 1992, 119).

Mills do not necessarily need such leats on larger streams and rivers as a matter of course. They are usually constructed because the siting of a mill across the main stream would be a major obstacle to access up and down stream. On larger rivers, this would include access for boats undertaking local trade, but even on smaller rivers the blockage of the main stream was a frequent cause of litigation, as it prevented salmon and other migratory fish access to the upper reaches to spawn. Salmon have always been important in the economy of any river system, and rights to fish were jealously guarded. Therefore, the importance of making a parallel leat to prevent mills blocking rivers can not be overstressed, and it is assumed that the Saxons would have constructed them. It is notable that many of the existing artificial leats associated with mills in England are close to the width of the original river course. To consider that historic societies would have thought a narrow side ditch sufficient passage for migrating fish (as we sadly do today) fails to appreciate the importance placed on this resource.

It is with this in mind that the mention of the 'old' and 'new' river in the vicinity of Woodmill and Gater's Mill on the Saxon charter for South Stoneham for 1045 is significant. This appears to suggest that river engineering associated with both mills, almost 1.5 kilometres apart, had been undertaken by this date. The lack of mention of the 'new river' in the bounds of an earlier charter of 990 x 992 seems to suggest that the work may have been undertaken between those dates and 1045. Biddle and Keene (1976, 270) quote the 1045 charter as evidence for alterations to the Itchen in the early medieval period, and note that although this may have been carried out to facilitate navigation, there is no further mention of such possibilities until the episcopate of Godfrey de Lucy (1189-1204). As this demonstrates, many earlier writers have seriously underplayed the fish passage argument, preferring to concentrate their efforts on the question of navigation.

Although Roberts (1985) has shown that the conjectured medieval canal built by de Lucy to Alresford was an antiquarian myth, it would seem possible that boat traffic may have been able to pass up-river by a channel by-passing Woodmill and Gater's Mill. Although the small-scale of the 1808/1810 maps may have exaggerated the size of the feature in relation to scale, it shows that it was still seen then as a continuous feature. The present

physical remains of this channel show that, where it has survived unmodified, it appears to have been large enough to allow small flat-bottomed boats to pass along it. This does not necessarily mean that this particular channel had boats passing along it, but its presence indicates that small boats may have been able to pass around Gater's Mill, by either this channel or the equivalent of the present river channel.

In a recent synthesis of the reasons for the decline of Hamwic, Morton (1992, 75) has suggested that many of its functions had migrated upstream to Winchester by the early tenth century at the latest. If the construction of the artificial river was to facilitate the moving of supplies into that town, it might be expected that it would have been undertaken by that date. The evidence, however, suggests that the work was carried out between 992 and 1045, and there is no clear evidence that boats could have reached Winchester until the building of the Itchen Navigation in the post-medieval period.

That the 'new river' was designed, at least partly, to allow boat traffic to pass around obstructions in the river seems a possibility, but the destination of that traffic must remain conjectural. A mill already existed at 'North Mansbridge' in 932, probably on the site of Gater's Mill. By 1086 there are two mills and two fisheries in the two Stonehams (Munby 1982, 3-16, 6-8), all of which would have probably caused obstructions on the Itchen. A mill and a 'sea weir' are first mentioned at South Stoneham in 1045, but they are not mentioned in 992. Could the need for the artificial river have been the building of a substantial new mill, with an important fishery, at Woodmill between 992 and 1045? Or was it simply that the problem had existed for much longer, but it had been tolerated until some unknown factor came into play, forcing the hand of the authorities to carry out what would have been a substantial undertaking?

The later history of the Itchen, with reference to possible navigation

A scan of some of the more obvious sources, both in the Hampshire Record Office and elsewhere, has failed to find any certain mention of this conjectured 'new river' after 1045. This need not be surprising because written records for the area do not generally resume until the early thirteenth century. With the passage of 150 years it is possible that the local circumstances had changed, and the channel had fallen into disuse. Certainly the national prominence of Winchester had declined considerably between the mid-eleventh and the thirteenth century when it had been replaced by London as the administrative centre of the realm, and the passage of boats in the former's direction may have become less urgent.

Roberts (1985) has made a detailed examination the tradition of a canal or navigation for boat traffic along the Itchen. This indicates that the tradition for Bishop de Lucy constructing a canal from Southampton to Alresford c. 1200 is an antiquarian fiction (ibid, 135). However, the argument against possible navigation to Winchester is not so clear cut. Records show that it was considered a desirable object from at least the thirteenth century. An inquisition was called in 1275 to examine this possibility. This concluded that a number of mills would need to be removed to allow passage. The Victoria County History argued that this implied that the jurors were attempting to improve 'an existing canal' (Hewitt 1912, 451-2), but Keene (1985, 57-9) argues the reverse, and states the canal was proposed, but never built.

Another enigmatic document is a copy of a charter giving Bishop de Lucy the right to take tolls on goods carried between Winchester and Southampton on a canal he is supposed to

have made. This document first occurs in the register of Bishop John de Pontoise in 1282, but there are commentators who consider it to be spurious (Deedes 1924, ii, 741; Keene 1985, 57-9).

There are certain anomalies, both in the documents themselves, and in the arguments for using them against the idea of a canal. The statement by the jurors that in order to get boats to Winchester, a number of mills must be destroyed can not be supported on the evidence that is available.

Firstly, it would be more convenient to build a by-pass leat around a mill than to destroy it. Secondly, it was normal practice to build a parallel leat for a mill anyway. Thirdly, there is considerable evidence to suggest that channels around a number of the mills mentioned as obstructions in 1275 did exist. Admittedly this evidence post-dates the inquisition, but there is a long tradition of building parallel leats in association with mills. These usually left the main river unobstructed, although it was not unknown for mills to be sited across the main river. That these leats can be shown to exist after 1275 implies that most of them probably existed from the date of the creation of the mills themselves.

For example, in a 1401 survey of the precincts of St. Cross Hospital, two rivers are mentioned in the vicinity of St. Cross Mill, the 'main river, known as Ichenstreame', and 'the old river' (Kirby 1899, 532-3). John More's map of the River Itchen between Woodmill and Winchester dated 1618 explains these references. This map shows the 'Ichenstreame' running to the east of St. Cross Mill (HRO 102M71/P1). Another river parallel to it, and feeding the mill was known historically as the mill stream (HRO W/H5/13). More recently, the mill stream has become the main river, whilst the 'Ichenstreame' has degenerated into a minor carrier for post-medieval water meadow ditches.

More's map shows similar by-pass channels, some of them of considerable length, around all the mills on the Itchen north of Gater's Mill except possibly Brambridge Mill, where a large mill-pond is shown downstream of the mill, without depicting any by-pass. On most of the Itchen examples, the mills seem to be on the artificial leats, with the main river acting as a by-pass. It can be concluded therefore that apart from Woodmill and Gater's Mill, and possibly Brambridge Mill, small boats may have been theoretically able to get around all the mills mentioned in 1275. It is unlikely that all these diversions came into being between 1275 and 1618 as this was not normal milling practice. It is possible one or two could have been built against tradition without the by-pass, but to have a whole river system with such anomalies is stretching credulity.

It is therefore probable that Woodmill and Gater's Mill had a by-pass channel at some stage in their history. None appears to exist in 1618 or it might be expected that they would be shown on a map that goes to such lengths to show the water arrangements of the other Itchen mills. A scan of the evidence has found no direct reference to such features despite a good series of records for Gater's Mill from 1433 to the present. The only known allusion to such a feature is that of the 1045 charter referring to the 'old' and 'new' river near Gater's Mill.

It is therefore possible that such a channel or channels existed in 1045, but later fell out of use. It would be tempting to suggest that it was disused by 1275, if the jurors' evidence for the other mills and their by-pass channels on the Itchen did not appear to be misleading. It

is even possible that the jurors' statement that passage as far as Bishopstoke might be allowed might remember a tradition that navigation was once possible to this point. Their qualifying statement that Woodmill would need to be destroyed to bring this about suggests that the existence of the conjectured by-pass around this mill had been forgotten by 1275. It might be suggested that the presence in the landscape of the remains of the feature would have been recognised by the jurors, but this would imply they had an understanding of landscape archaeology. If the earthworks could have existed for so long in the present century, without exciting antiquarian comment, why should it be expected that 13th century jurors would have recognised them for what they were? It is additionally curious that a number of early sources, such as William Dugdale, claim that de Lucy 'restored' the navigation of the river, implying that it had been possible before his time, but had fallen out of use (Hewitt 1912, 451).

If Keene and Deedes (*op. cit.*) can argue that the charter in de Pontoise's register is a forgery by propagandists wishing to discourage the citizens of Winchester wanting the canal (the bishop's right to collect tolls being the discouraging factor), it is possible the jurors of 1275 were also part of the same deceitful game. Intentionally or otherwise, they seem to be giving the inquisition false information. At the worst some of the by-pass streams would need to be dug out because they might be too full of silt to allow navigation. Possibly some of the mills were without the diversions shown in 1618. This is unlikely, but it would not have required all that much effort to dig them. Instead the jurors stubbornly state that all the mills on the river would need to be destroyed, a statement that is untrue. It is not impossible therefore that the jurors were either being bribed, or were, by inclination, against the idea of navigation. The evidence of the inquisition can not therefore be accepted as objective.

The conclusion to be drawn from this curious chapter is that in the thirteenth century there was a desire to have a navigation up the Itchen to Winchester, and that there would appear to be a faction against it. The ability to show this seem to negate Keene's argument that navigation never existed. All we can say for certain is that the evidence both for and against a thirteenth century passage is unreliable. Although this does not speak for the existence of an earlier passage, it seems to imply there could have been a historical tradition for navigation before the thirteenth century. This does not suggest that the Saxons had created passage to Winchester, but the evidence seems to suggest they could have reached Bishopstoke, a mile or so above Gater's Mill. Even partial navigation at one time could have been the fuel required for the imaginations of the pro-canal faction.

Perhaps the more realistic argument against the existence of a 13th-century canal constructed by Bishop de Lucy is that most of the materials leaving Southampton for Winchester in the medieval period went by road. It is notable that heavy items such as building stone for Winchester Castle seem to have gone by cart in 1220, and again in 1258 (Keene 1985, 58). Even more damning are the building slates that were brought by boat to Woodmill in 1289, and then taken on to Winchester overland (Keene 1985, 58). Certainly the Brokage Books for the port of Southampton seem to indicate traffic in the fifteenth century to Winchester was exclusively by cart.

However, the desire for navigation refused to die. In 1538 the mayor and aldermen of Winchester concluded that the main cause of their present poverty was the lack of transport on the Itchen. The departure of Bishop Gardiner soon after this allowed part of Woodmill to be demolished, but there is no evidence that this was connected with

navigation. Only the migration of salmon appears to have benefited from this action (Keene 1985, 59).

In 1617 another attempt was made to revive interest in a navigation. A survey was commissioned to be carried out by John More (Course 1983, 6), resulting in the map of the river of 1618. Finally in 1665, work began on that 'canal' now known as the Itchen Navigation. This was supposed to have been completed by 1671, but work does not seem to have finished until 1710. This watercourse took an entirely different route to the water channel under discussion here. A lock was built at Woodmill to by-pass the mill, thereafter the course followed the main river (calling the present river, 'the main river' implies it follows a natural channel, but even this can not be said with any certainty) to a point just beyond Mansbridge before heading north along the western side of the Itchen valley. This enterprise was never entirely successful, and was much hampered by competition for water from water meadow carriers and mills. With the coming of the railways, traffic almost ceased. The last commercial barge to use it was in 1869, from which time it has been neglected, and is now dry for considerable sections (Course 1983, 5-7).

General discussion

The two Stonehams may have once formed part of a large estate, centred on an important mid-Saxon villa regalis of Hamton from which developed the trading port of Hamwic (Hase 1975, 142-43). The subsequent division of this estate is discussed elsewhere (Currie 1995). Disruptions caused by Viking raids, and the rise in importance of Winchester are thought to be amongst a number of reasons responsible for the decline of Hamwic (Morton 1992, 75-77). The charter evidence, which shows the granting of the Stonehams to church estates in Winchester, may be partly reflecting the shifting of power in the region northwards (Yorke 1984, 66). As the economic ties of the Stonehams with Hamwic declined from the mid-ninth century, so the urge to reorganise them and their boundaries may have been felt. There appears to be some delay before the process is completed, probably in the first half of the eleventh century. The apparent date of c. 992-1045 for river engineering on the lower Itchen suggests a possible connection with this development.

Navigation in the tidal and lower reaches of rivers seems to have had an important role in the local economy. Timber from Botley was moved down the River Hamble to Bursledon and Portsmouth in the post-medieval period (Currie 1991), and it is suggested that Southampton may have been served in the same way at an earlier date. Saxon charters refer to a 'new river' near Swaythling, but this is probably a late Saxon response to the obstruction of traffic that had been plying the lower river for generations. Certainly, the present form of the river at Woodmill obscures the original layout considerably. Before the building of a lock for the 17th-century navigation at Woodmill, the river here may have once been quite different. There is good evidence to suggest that the tidal river may have once extended beyond this point⁷.

The evidence given above, however, shows that the arguments for and against early passage for boat traffic between Southampton and Winchester are extremely complex. The discovery of a substantial water channel, apparently allowing the by-passing of Woodmill and Gater's Mills, has prompted a need to ensure that arguments put forward by Keene (1985, 57-9) and Roberts (1985) against a thirteenth-century and later passage up-river are

not used as arguments against an earlier passage. It is also suggested that the strong local tradition for navigation may have been related to an early passage on the lower river.

On the evidence of later maps, mainly the original 1808 drawing of the 1810 OS map, and the South Stoneham tithe, it seems that the channel emanated from the leat that ran under Gater's Mill at these dates. That is the right hand channel of the two currently existing at Gater's Mill. However, such evidence is late, and the nature of any old channels would have had many years to change. The 1770 map of Allington manor offers a possible explanation. This states that the 'left hand stream L runs thro' ye Coll[ege] Corn Mill' whilst the 'main river half of which is College property runs thro' ye Paper Mill' (HRO 28M61/2).

This evidence initially seems to suggest that the channel here under discussion is part of a mill leat. However, should readers refer back to the records cited above, they will find that the paper mill stood on the site of a fulling mill, which was next to the corn mill. This fulling mill was built before 1360, and placed over a 'fishery'. In the later 19th century the Flemings and the Gaters went to court over this fishing. The latter claimed to own 'half' the fishing to the midway point on the river as the due of Allington manor. The 1770 map then states that 'half' the main river runs through the paper mill. This is an indirect reference to the half rights to the fishing of the main stream. By following these clues back one comes to the conclusion that the right-hand stream (that issuing into the conjectured 'Saxon' channel) had been built over by a fulling mill before 1360, thus blocking the 'fishery' of the river.

It would appear from this that the present river course around Gater's Mill appears to have been the leat for the apparently older corn mill. The right hand stream that seemed to issue down into Gater's 'Lake' in 1845 fed the paper mill, which was a later building. This may suggest that the conjectured 'Saxon' channel was thus the 'main' river, but by 1770 it was probably highly uncertain which channel was the original river. It is nevertheless interesting that what now appears to be a side channel was the unobstructed passage for at least migrating fish at some time before 1360.

This hypothesis is supported by an inquisition of January 1618, into the ability of the River Itchen to support navigation, that describes Gater's Mill as thus:

'... the Maine River is turned out of its ancient course by the erecting and settinge uppon of One Mill called uppmill being the Mill of Mr Bromfield or of his assigned and that there are Baies and Banks made which do Stopp and hinder the olde and ancient course of the Said River turning the said River to maintain the said Mill and that the dytch of the said ancient River right against the said Banks and Bayes is incroched uppon' (HRO 36M70/8).

There are a number of other possibilities amongst the relict water courses on the lower river to explain the 1045 charter bounds. For example, the present river may have originally been a mill leat for Woodmill. The river between Woodmill and Manesbridge is very much as shown on John More's map of 1618, so 17th century navigation may not have altered it significantly. The smaller channel that runs north of the present river, still taking a considerable flow, may have been the main river at one time. This thesis could still be pushed into the order of the Saxon charter, that is that the old river is reached from the north first, before the 'new' one. One only has to look at the clear evidence at St. Cross

Mill to see how easily a once major river course can degenerate into little more than a watermeadow ditch in time.

There is another possibility that fits the order of the old and new rivers on the Saxon charter. This is that the substantial stream that enters the main river 100m below Gater's Mill at SU 45151559 was the 'old' river of the charter, with the river feeding into the mill being the 'new' river. This ties in with arguments made above about the situation at Gater's Mill before 1770. This leads on to the possibility that the channel here under discussion may have only acted as a by-pass around Gater's Mill, rejoining the present river just below Manesbridge. The maps of 1808 and 1845 show that at a point approximately SU 445153 the channel divided at this date. One option led back to the main river.

It would seem possible therefore that the water channel here discussed can be linked with a 'new river' recorded on a charter for South Stoneham of 1045. This hints that passage for boats may have been obtained at least as far as Bishopstoke at this time. It may not have been specifically along this channel, but the channel's existence seems to offer the possibility of a passage around the mills in some form. It also implies that passage may have existed earlier that had been blocked by the expanding milling and fishing interests on the river over the course of the Late Saxon period. It is not possible to argue on present evidence that navigation was available as far as Winchester in the eleventh century, although barges could have off-loaded at Bishopstoke, an important episcopal manor, before continuing northwards by road.

It is possible that the bishops had once gained revenue from this passage, but it had fallen out of use by the episcopate of de Lucy in the late twelfth century. Around this time a spurious charter appears that gave the bishops the right to levy toll on the river, and claims to have cut a new passage to Winchester. Could this possibly be because there was talk of making a passage in the later thirteenth century, and the bishops were keen to revive some old right they may have had in advance of the intentions of the citizens of Winchester?

It is possible that the long-standing tradition of navigation along the Itchen was founded on a passage that may have existed in the Late Saxon period. Unfortunately, the period when this conjectured passage may have been operating, in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, is one of the poorest documented periods in English history. It would be expected that growing activity in the Itchen valley between 1045 and 1204 increased the demand for milling facilities, thus further impeding navigation. The 'new river' may have fallen out of effective use by 1275, if not before the time of de Lucy. It is unlikely that any further evidence will now be forthcoming to clear up the mystery, and the conclusion forced on us is that man-made navigation on the Itchen may have existed briefly, but this was short-lived, and possibly of a limited extent (to Bishopstoke?). Nevertheless, this existence created a folk-memory that refused to die. Even the threat of reviving it seems to have prompted the bishops of Winchester to produce a forgery to lay claim to rights on the river, probably more as a safeguard against vague existing rights that could then only be dimly remembered, rather than as an attempt to hijack revenues from any new proposals.

Conclusion

Although only archaeological excavation may be the only means of arriving at a definitive date for the water channel discussed here, it would appear to be a man-made feature.

Whilst not ruling out the possibility that part of the feature may have been created after the Saxon period, there is evidence to suggest that it may be associated with the 'new river' recorded on a Saxon charter for South Stoneham of 1045. This charter does not explain why a 'new river' was needed, but it is most likely to be related with obstruction to fish migration, navigation, or a combination of both factors. This obstruction seems to have resulted from the creation of Woodmill and Gater's Mills. The importance of the salmon and eel fisheries on this part of the river is well documented, and the important industrial complexes that grew up at both mill sites would have had significant impact on them.

Although it is not possible to prove conclusively that the earthwork was connected with river navigation, the evidence presented suggests that there is a case to be answered. Regardless of how this question is finally resolved, the navigation discussed here was unlikely to have extended further than Bishopstoke. Edward Roberts' 1985 essay against the existence of the de Lucy canal to Winchester and Alreford remains convincing.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to George Watts, Kevin White, Alan Morton and Dr Barbara Yorke for their suggestions on drafts of the text in various early forms. Kevin White, Alan Morton, Bob Thompson, Edward Roberts and George Watts are further thanked for visiting the site with the author, and for making their own keen observations. Finally thanks go to Harold Barstow who offered the author much useful primary information about the history of the area. The conclusions are the author's own.

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Notes

1. There are a number of interpretations possible for any given set of bounds. In this instance the important point is that the bounds are approaching from Swaythling, and the 'old' river is reached first from a north or north-westerly direction.

2. An inquisition of 21-23 January 1618 into the ability of the Itchen to support navigation records an orchard called Townhill Orchard 'upon the said river near the bridge called Mansbridge' (HRO 36M70/8).

3. Past writers have been too ready to link early references to fishing on the lower Itchen with the Salmon Pool at Woodmill. The Greatrex reference to a half a weir 'at Bitterne' is supported by a 1550 rental of Bishop's Waltham hundred that makes reference to a similar 'half weir' in the tithing of Weston (Barstow 1994, 205-06). The implication here is that there were weirs in South Stoneham below the Salmon Pool as late as the 16th century. One has to consider the possibility that the Salmon Pool may not have been the fishery referred to in the charter of 1045 or Domesday Book.

4. The use of the term 'lake' for a piece of still water is a largely modern word for still water (from OE *lacu*, meaning stream), although it is not unknown from the later 18th century in ornamental contexts. If the latter, what was Gater doing putting such a long ornamental feature in this situation? It had no house to ornament, and there is no other evidence of landscape ornamentation in the immediate 1840s landscape. In the more reasonable event that Gater was using it as a fishpond, it ought to have been marked as such. The ornamental plantings in Marlhill Copse that are presently visible date from the early 20th century, when the designed landscape at Townhill Park was extended in this direction.

5. See note 2.

6. These ingenious traps relied on the eels' ability to leave the water and crawl overland when encountering obstructions to their migration from freshwater to spawn at sea. They comprise an iron rack, probably a wooden hurdle in earlier times, that is placed in the entrance to a sluice or where the water flows under the mill-wheel. Any place where the water is channelled into narrow confines will suffice. This rack is placed so that it is at an angle of 45 degrees to the bottom of the river, with one end firmly placed in that bottom, and the other end protruding out of the water. The eels finding their passage blocked will usually wait until nightfall, and then crawl up the rack. The top of the rack is blocked in some way to prevent them dropping over the edge. Again finding their passage blocked, the eels will find a deliberately-cut hole in the side of the channel wall through which they can pass. From here they can drop down into a water tank, which they mistake for the river. There is no way out of this tank, and all the miller has to do is collect the trapped eels in the morning. On a night when the eels are moving down river to spawn, one of these traps can take over a hundred fish per night. The 'Rackis' mentioned at Woodmill in the fifteenth century is probably one of these traps.

7. Before the River Authorities constructed the present fish pass at Woodmill *c.* 1980, the river was still influenced by tides as high as Gater's Mill. George Watts (pers. comm.) considers that tidal influence may have once reached as high as Bishopstoke. This is supported by a reputed return of fish taken in 1819 out of the waters adjoining the manor of Allington (HRO 85M88W/12, p. 34). This included 100 plaice and 100 flounders. Both are essentially sea fish that are known to enter brackish water in the lower reaches of local rivers.

Illustrations (to be sent on later)

Fig. 1: location

Fig. 2: Gater's Mill as shown on a map of the manor of Allington, 1770 (Winchester College Muniments)

Fig. 3: The Ordnance Survey Surveyor's 2" to one mile scale drawing of the lower Itchen area showing the water channel under discussion.

Fig. 4: A tracing of an extract of the tithe map for South Stoneham of 1845 showing part of the water channel marked as no 1418, 'lake'.