

Kenwood House Lakes

CAS Site 481, excavation report

Introduction

Kenwood House stands 12km north-west of the city of London, at OSGR TQ 271 873. The ponds excavated are situated *c* 250m to the south of the house, at the base of a pastured slope.

By 1992, the three lakes (Thousand Island Pond, Wood Pond and Weir Pond) had become badly silted, with their edges often indistinct. Consequently, it was decided that these areas would be dredged by the Star Construction Group, with the object of reinstating them as part of the formal layout of the landscape. The archaeological input, consisting of watching brief and limited excavation was provided by the CEU, under the direction of Pete Crane, between October 1992 and March 1993.

Background

The Thousand Pound Pond was first recorded in 1793, by which time Wood Pond had been formed out of three of the four earlier fish ponds, with the fourth being now known as Weir Pond, shown on John Roque's plan of London dated 1745. Although it would have been normal practice for such ponds to be cleaned out periodically, it would appear that such maintenance had not been carried out at Kenwood, at least during this century.

The aims of the project, together with the establishment of the original form of the lakes, included searching for structural evidence, such as revetting, lining, or water control mechanisms. Evidence also was to be sought for the earlier ponds. Surveys of the lakes in 1870 (, and their form compared to that shown in the 1870 OS survey, to determine the degree of contour change.

Results

Thousand Pound (or Concert) Pond

The original water sluice and its straining box were discovered in the middle of the western end of the pond. This consisted of a cast iron pipe angled upwards from the pond, and a box of timbers to stop silt and other debris from blocking the pipe. Although the box was damaged by the machine, and later whilst attempting to clear around the outside, it was substantially constructed of upright timbers, and at least one cross-brace was located. In plan, the box was a right-angled triangle, with the top of the box capped by perforated wooden planks (which had been disturbed). An iron grill was discovered at around the same time as this feature, and may have been connected.

A timber revetment was discovered on the south side of the Thousand Pound Pond, consisting of upright oaken posts, set at intervals of *c* 0.6m, and sawn elm planks. Three guns were recovered, including what appeared to be a service revolver, along with a jumper and gloves; these were handed over to the local police.

As the result of archive work by Carol Colson, it was demonstrated that the level of the 'Sham Bridge' on the south bank of the pond had been set too low in relation to the correct waster level. This error resulted from the reconstruction of the bridge in 1930 by the LCC, when it was wrongly positioned in relation to the long-standing water level of the lake, which had been lowered to suit the height of the bridge and to limit erosion of the banks.

Wood Pond

A penstock timber pipe (elm) with an iron grill plus a vertical hole (possibly for a valve) were discovered (dwgs 511-4). The end was contained within a wooden straining-box (pine), consisting of four upright posts with planked sides. This was probably part of the water control system for the pond *c* 1760, although it appears that the box was a replacement for a more substantial construction, from which two posts and a piece of timber survived.

Immediately to the west of the straining-box, there were some fragmentary traces of wattling. A probable wooden drain, fashioned from a dug-out log, was set into the pond-side at the tail of the Wood Pond, and was possibly

hollowed out as a pipe where it went below the bank. A possible brick-lined well (or garden feature) was also discovered.

The trench for an elm pipe (located on dwg 515, and found with its bung), below the stone bridge, produced an early eighteenth century London Type 25 clay-pipe bowl (see specialist report by D. Higgins).

Two timber pipes, and a wooden valve and fittings (illustrated on dwgs 517-20) were discovered in a modern manhole trench, which had been dug to replace the penstock valve between the Wood and Thousand Pound Ponds.

Weir Pond

Four trenches were excavated on the banks of the Weir Pond ('Plan 3'), which revealed an earlier sloping bank, with a vertical cut at approximately water level. This steepness of the banks was greater than had been foreseen.

The main discovery at this lake was that the Weir, which gave its name to the present pond, was only a modern construction, dating to *c.* 1900. Two brick culverts in the north bank suggest that the water level was, at one time, lower than the outlet level. It is possible that an earlier weir existed, but was dismantled prior to the present construction.

Some stonework was observed in the bottom and sides of the inlet, which may be the remnants of a former construction known as the 'Delainey Bridge'.

Artefacts

Apart from the objects described earlier, there was very little in the way of finds, which all appear to have been discarded into the lakes. These were all post-medieval, and consisted mainly of lemonade and other bottles, together with the upper part of a Hornby type steam engine model (*c*1950s). The clay pipe stems are described in the accompanying report by D.A. Higgins.

There were further stray finds, mostly wooden (oak and pine) which were discarded on site, after recording. These were mainly planks, but included a possibly re-used earlier penstock (dwg 509), and a ?machine-made decorative post. A calcerenite sandstone ?seat-base was also discovered, which had presumably once formed part of the garden furniture.

Stéphane Rault, May 1997