

A HISTORY OF FLEET POND



n the death of King Edred in 955 AD his fourteen year old nephew Edwig ascended the throne of England. Two years later Edwig's brother Edgar reached fourteen years of age and the Kingdom was divided into two. Edgar was given the northern region of Mercia and Northumbria while Edwig retained Wessex.

When Edwig died in 959 AD the two kingdoms were reunited under King Edgar. He immediately appointed his former tutor, Aethelwold, to the prestigious Bishopric of Winchester and confirmed to the Prior and Monks of St Swithan's their possession of the Crondall Hundred in which Fleet Pond was to lie.

This land was administered by the Bishop for the support of the monks. It is believed that two large ponds were formed in the 12th century by constructing embankments which dammed the streams flowing from Bourly Hill to the area known as 'La Flete' on the low-lying land at Crookham Common.

These ponds were stocked with fish by the monks and managed by them to provide an essential source of food for the local population. A reference to a fishery in the Crondall records of 1316 AD may relate to these ponds.

Ownership and management by the monks continued until 1505 when the fishery and pasture were leased to tenant farmer, Sir William Giffard, and his son John. They were charged an annual rent of 23s 4d for the pasture and one hundred fish for the fishery. The fish were to be delivered 'in a good and fresh state' to the Bishop of Winchester during Lent or between the feasts of Easter and Pentecost.

A sixty year lease was transferred to George Paulet in 1558 AD. In lieu of the obligation to send fresh fish, which must have been difficult with no rail nor motorway links, he was to pay annually 23s 4d for the pasture and 20s for the ponds and fishery.



In 1567 a heavy storm and flood carried away the head of one of the ponds, this is thought to be where Ancells Farm is now located. To save the cost of repair the Dean, who had succeeded to the possession in 1541, gave permission to convert the site of this pond to pasture.

The leasing arrangement for Fleet Farm, pasture and ponds continued for some 350 years though the Enclosures Act removed the Common Rights for Hawley Common in 1817 and in 1834 for Crookham Common. Thus the grazing of Commoners stock, peat digging and other ancient practices came to an end and the land was divided up amongst the gentry to develop as they saw fit.

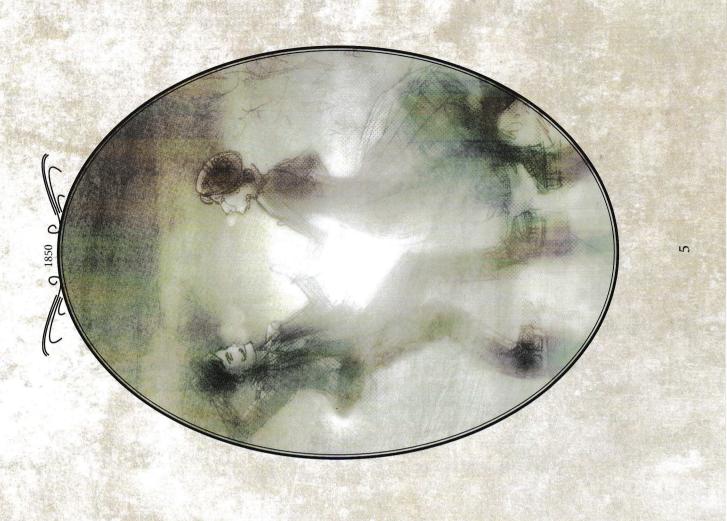
Fleet Mill Pond, as well as certain allotments of waste land, was bought by the London and Southampton Railway Company in 1836 for £50 from the Dean and Chapter of Winchester. It then set about building a line from London to Southampton. The engineers did not allow an ancient Pond to stand in their way and they built an embankment across it. This embankment was an innovative construction for the time and still divides the Pond in two today.



The potential for day trippers from London was not lost on the Railway Company Board and a station, called Fleet Pond Halt was built. Visitors came to enjoy the fresh air and natural setting by picnicking and swimming in the summer and ice skating in the winter.

Developers saw an opportunity and bought up the land around the Pond where they built second homes for wealthy Londoners. Some visitors eventually moved permanently to the Pond area and commuted up to town. Traders moved in and set up businesses to service these house owners and so Fleet Town was born.





Large areas of land around Aldershot were acquired for military training in 1854 and Fleet Pond was included in this estate. As part of their training the Royal Engineers built Fir Tree Island on the Pond, as well as a long T shaped jetty which went out into water from the eastern side and a large bridge across the centre. Of these only the island remains. In 1904 the Railway Company built a new station south of the bridge which remains the site of today's station.



In 1905 the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE) Farnborough was developed as the 'Army Balloon Factory'. In 1907 the first British military airship was built there and in October 1908 Samuel Cody made his inaugural powered flight. Geoffrey de Havilland conducted float plane trials on Fleet Pond in 1912. Aircraft and aviation testing continued and the Establishment played a critical role in the advance of aviation throughout the First World War and afterwards.

Early in the Second World War, the Pond was drained and the land planted with willows as it was feared this large body of water would provide a valuable navigation feature to the Luftwaffe who were determined to bomb Farnborough Airfield. One local resident recalled how his parents sent him off armed with a bucket to collect fish trapped in the diminishing puddles, a most welcome addition to their diet at that time of rationing. In 1947 the Pond was refilled and reeds were planted.

The importance of the Reserve to wildlife was recognised in 1951 and it was named as one of the first Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Hampshire. The SSSI status was confirmed in 1984 under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The small pond on the other side of the railway had lost SSSI status by this time due to development around it.

The Army declared the area redundant as training land in 1972 and Fleet Urban District Council (FUDC) purchased it in 1973, transferring ownership to Hart District Council in 1974 when FUDC ceased to exist.

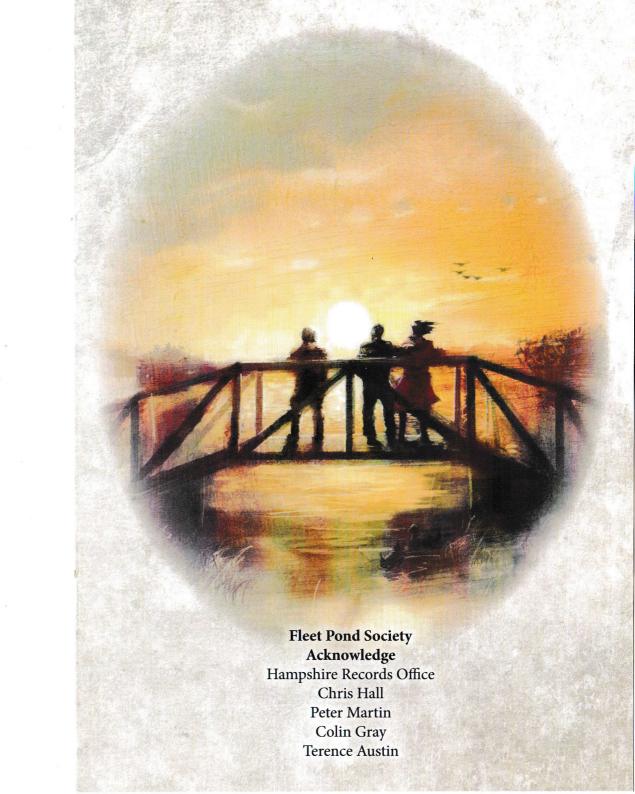


The Reserve covers approximately 57 hectares with the Pond accounting for 21 of them. Fleet Pond Society was formed in April 1976 to assist in the management of the Reserve and at its suggestion the land was declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1977. Society volunteers opened up a complete circular path around the pond and began selective habitat management in 1983.

They took on more day-to-day responsibility when a lack of funds meant the reserve lost both its Ranger and the district's Nature Reserves' Warden. It was during this time that they carried out several other major works. A more detailed description of the tasks undertaken can be found in 'The History of the Fleet Pond Society - the First 30 Years' by Peter Martin.

Today the Society continues to carry out management work in conjunction with the Rangers. Cattle are now used in enclosures around the pond to keep down the scrub and volunteers keep an eye on them to ensure they remain fit.

On one Sunday in each month a large body of volunteers, young and old, carry out conservation tasks under the eagle eye of the Society Chairman. Volunteer groups from local companies, youth groups and schools also come along to help.





Map

The History of Fleet Pond
Narrative Board
can be viewed at
Boathouse
Landing on the
North side of
the pond.

www.fleetpond.fccs.org.uk www.hants.gov.uk www.andyjohnsonart.com



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