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## **Ponds and Archaeology**

### ***Introduction***

Worcestershire has one of the greatest numbers of historic ponds of any county in England. There are medieval fishponds, medieval moats, medieval and later millponds (for flour, metalworking, fulling or weaving), brick-making pits and park ponds. The high point of pond construction was in the medieval period when fishponds were important economically and formed key elements of the large monastic estates in the county. They are found in villages and on the monastic farms (granges). Some of the ponds had more than one use. The moat of a medieval manor house might have been dug primarily as a status symbol, but was frequently also used as a fishpond. Moated sites and fishponds fell out of use in the 16th century but the medieval moats at Strensham and Hartlebury had a new lease of life during the 17th century when converted to Civil War forts. The development of the brick industry from the 16th century created a new class of pond which was created as a by-product of the excavation of clay. Earlier clay pits were connected with the pottery making industry around Malvern.

In all, over 150 medieval fishponds in Worcestershire are recorded on the County Historic Environment Record. There are over 40 millponds in North Worcestershire alone. Some of these are officially classed as being nationally important as *Scheduled Ancient Monuments*. It is an offence to undertake any works on the latter without permission obtained through English Heritage. But every pond has its own particular importance in the heritage of its locality. The survival of early deposits within the pond may also contain valuable environmental evidence for the changing landscape of the county.

### ***Survival of Historic Ponds***

Ponds survive in a variety of conditions. Some are still open and full of water, others are badly overgrown and some are now completely dry.

### ***Restoration of Historic Ponds***

Grants are available to assist with the restoration of ponds but this has to be carefully undertaken to avoid damage to their historic character.

1. Find out more about the pond's history
  - ◆ Consult the County Historic Environment Record (Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service).
  - ◆ Check old maps - the parish Tithe Map or Enclosure Map or the First edition of the Ordnance Survey map (Historic Environment Service has digital copies of some maps. See also County Record Office).
  - ◆ Look at the surrounding landscape. Is there surviving evidence of related features - drainage channels, leats, sluices - or other archaeological features.
  - ◆ When, and how often, has it been dredged?
2. Seek professional guidance
  - ◆ Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service advises on the management of the historic aspects of ponds and liaises with other advisors on ecological matters.

### **Further Action**

In most cases, the archaeologist will advise minimum intervention. It is important to

- ◆ maintain the outline of the pond
- ◆ maintain the profile of the pond sides and bottom
- ◆ avoid damaging the lining of the pond
- ◆ preserve any medieval deposits within the pond.

Clearance of surrounding scrub, overhanging vegetation or clearance of water vegetation will not cause any damage. Care should, however be taken on bringing machinery up to a pond to avoid damaging surrounding archaeological features. Advice should, however, be sought before any dredging operations. If the pond has been extensively dredged already then this will probably not cause further damage. It may, however, be possible to establish the depth of modern silting so as to leave medieval deposits intact. Unless in exceptional circumstances, it is not advisable to try to reflood dry medieval earthworks. On such sites, the abandonment is now part of its history.

### **Ponds to Visit**

#### **Medieval Fishponds**

*Grimley* WSM 6730 SO 8370 6060

Intact string of three ponds once belonging to the Prior of Worcester. Sixteenth century references tell of restoration works with the pond being relined with clay and clearance of sedges.

*Chaddesley Corbett* WSM 5326 SO 8898 7342

A large pond (now dry) over 100m long with a secondary tank 40m long. The leats and overflow channels also survive.

*Bordesley Abbey* WSM 810 SP 0470 6860

Although the outline of these impressive ponds has been preserved, the ponds were dredged in the 1960s and much of the scientific value was lost.

#### **Millponds**

*Bordesley Abbey* WSM 7248 SP 0504 6861

Dry earthworks of the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century mill and millpond. The site is one of the few medieval mills to have been excavated.

*Churchill Forge* WSM 1183 SO 8830 7956

The present mill and ponds date to c.1800 but documentary references suggest that this was built on the site of an earlier mill dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The flour mill was converted to a blade mill in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and made edged shovels and ladles into the 1960s.

#### **Moats**

*Strensham Moat*. WSM 287 SO 9046 4097

Medieval moat with an inner and outer ditch converted into a Civil War fort in the 17th century.

*Hartlebury* WSM 1 SO 8360 7125

Medieval moated site which was the palace of the Bishop of Worcester. It was converted into a Civil War fort and the moat was then landscaped in the 18th century.

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### **Useful Addresses**

Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service, Woodbury Hall, University College Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ. Tel: 01905 855455. Fax 01905 855035

County Record Office, County Hall, Spetchley, Worcester WR5 2NP. Tel: 01905 766351

Conservation and Heritage Officer, County Hall, Spetchley, Worcester, WR5 2NP. Tel: 01905 766730

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Lower Smite Farm, Smite Hill, Hindlip, Worcester. Tel: 01905 754919