

Fleet Pond: A History

Fleet itself is an Old English term, referring in some sense, to a stream. Fleet Pond was included within a gift of a large expanse of land bequeathed to the Old Monastery at Winchester in 940 AD, which included all of what is now Crookham and Hawley.

The first clear reference to Fleet does not come until 1313, followed by a more detailed mention in 1324 when "the great fishery (of) the Fleet Ponds" is referred to in the rolls of account of Crondall Manor. By this time there seems to have been a thriving fishery of considerable importance and two ponds.

Many bishopric ponds were created in the second half of the 12th Century thus Fleet Pond could have been in existence by 1200. An existing watercourse would have been dammed to build up a head of water, and it has been conjectured that the combined surface area of the two ponds exceeded 200 acres. The fishery was supervised and managed locally, probably from the two farms recorded at Fleet.

Later medieval references to Fleet Ponds are few, but include further expenses for nets, boats and repairs to the bridge. There seems to have been some kind of causeway dividing the two ponds, which possibly carried a road of some importance, given the oft repeated requirement to keep it in good condition.

In 1491 a new arrangement was instigated. The Prior at Winchester began to lease Fleet Ponds and the pasture there to a tenant at Fleet Farm, at an annual rent of 23 shillings and 4 pence plus "a hundred of the fishes, pike, tenches, perches, bream and roaches, to be carried and delivered (to Winchester) in a good and fresh state".

On 7th April 1836, the London and Southampton Railway Company purchased, for £50, "the Fleet Mill Pond and certain allotments of wasteland belonging to Fleet Farm", from the Dean and Chapter of Winchester. Allotments were heathlands, the surrounding land was ripe for development and a new settlement, taking its name from the Pond, began to grow.

The pond itself, meanwhile, became a part of the new military estate based at Aldershot, and was under the jurisdiction of the army from 1854 and 1972.

In 1951, it became one of the first Sites and Special Scientific Interest to be notified in Hampshire. The reasons for the designation were the importance of the lake to waterfowl, the rich aquatic and heathland flora and the extensive area (Fleet Pond is the largest freshwater lake in the county of Hampshire). The SSSI was reaffirmed in 1984 under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, but covering the smaller area of one hundred and eighteen and a half acres, of which water itself accounts for 52 acres.

In 1972, the then Fleet Urban District Council purchased the pond, together with adjacent heathland and woodland, from the Ministry of Defence. The Fleet Pond Society was founded four years later (April 1976). In 1977 the land was declared as a Local Nature Reserve. (Hall 1997)