

Maintaining the ancient Ansty Pond

Those of you in Ansty who can recall the famous Ansty ‘Village Book’ produced under the auspices of Mr. Tony Keating (who occupied the Ansty manor between the mid-1980s and 2011) will surely remember part of an excellent chapter devoted to ‘Ansty and its Water’ written by the late Liz Knight of Basil’s Cottage.

Indeed, the history of Ansty Pond was examined in some detail by Liz and in view of the impending works to dredge and repair parts of the embankment and wall of Ansty Pond by Mr and Mrs Morgan, current owners of Ansty Manor, it seems now is the time to bring back to life Liz’s words and put the latest operations on the pond into context.

“ When it rains very heavily two winterbournes are exposed on the south of Ansty. One of them is from South Farm and runs under the A30 and then along the village High Street to the pond. A bridge was built over the winterbourne for the track to South Farm. *(The other rises in Denmead Copses adjacent to Shave Lane and joins the South Farm winterbourne before flowing under the A30)*

“In the late 18th century the junction of the A30 and the village high street was raised considerably as this area flooded easily in winter. The old road was below the present High Street, on the west side – almost along the river bed itself.

“Once in Ansty the stream flows through to the location of Ansty Pond which was originally a series of marshy springs *that swelled the Ansty stream* and then *continues* northwards along the west side of the high street. *The Ansty stream flows through culverts under Blind Lane and Kings Lane, collecting yet more water from a mischievous stream flowing from Ansty Coombe. This Coombe stream is not a winterbourne, never dries out and is prone to flash flooding during wet weather.* The stream from Ansty Coombe joins the Ansty Stream (through meadows) south of Shepherds Cottage. The Ansty stream finally joins a similar watercourse flowing from

Swallowcliffe down Yule Hill and joins Ansty Water just beyond the road bridge on the Swallowcliffe to Tisbury Road.

“The combined streams continue to flow alongside Tisbury Row and eventually join the Nadder, just east of Tisbury.

“At the north end of our village is ‘Ansty Water’, so called because a wooden bridge was built across the stream water. *(Probably built to replace an earlier ford.)*

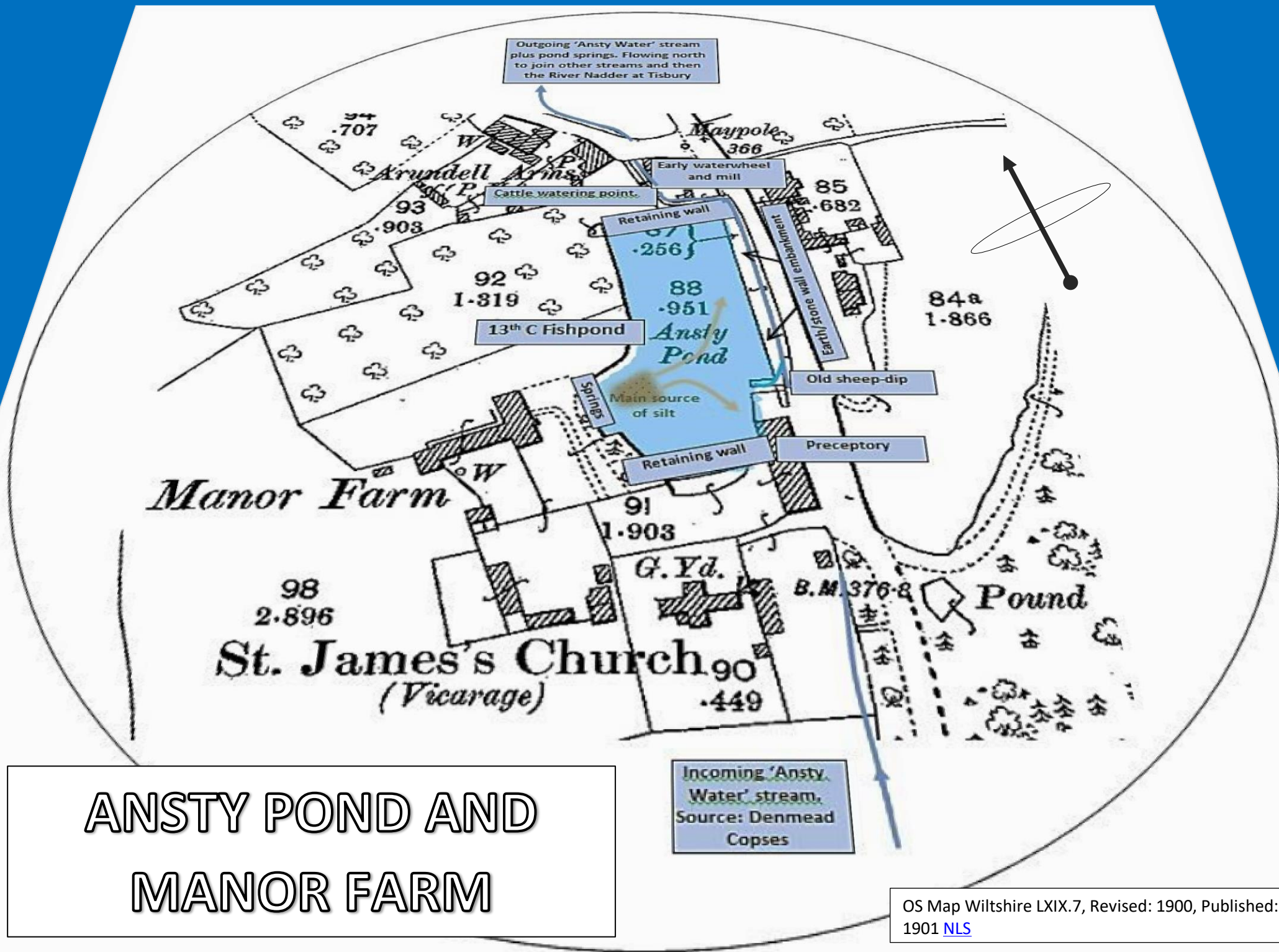
“In the 13th century the Knights Hospitaller (granted the Manor in 1230) constructed a large fish pond where the springs rose immediately below the manor house and a retaining wall and bank were created to form a pond. This was stocked with fish and duck, providing necessary food *and also allowed a head of water* for mills to be established, one of which is recorded in the 14th century and was almost certainly located just north of the pond to take advantage of the *difference in water levels*.

“A sheep dip was once *located* by the original Hospice and you can see the stones between the boards were placed to form this dip.

“At the north end of the pond was a track into the stream where a horse and cart with an open barrel on board came to collect water for cattle. There was a box in the pond with an auger and a riddle. The riddle is like a skewer and as it was turned the water flowed into the barrel.

“Dredging the pond was very important due to the sediment that is *continually* brought up by the springs. There was a sluice gate on the north side of the pond to drain it and let the mud run right through the village! Other methods were used to dredge the pond. Sometimes rafts were floated with men stirring up the silt and mud on the bottom to get it to rush out of the sluice. Later a steam engine was positioned at either end of the pond to pull a dredger to and fro with a long piece of rope. More recently (in the 1990s) suction machines have been used to take the silt away in tankers.”

Words in *italics* inserted by website author to put Liz’s article in context.



The last time Ansty Pond was cleared of silt was in the mid-1990s. Mr Tony Keating was then the owner of Ansty Manor. Like several owners before him Mr Keating carried on the (expensive) tradition of periodically maintaining the pond by removing accumulated silt and mud and repairing the retaining walls and embankment alongside the High Street. This involved the raising and lowering of the water levels in the pond which in this instance was achieved by siphoning the water (over a period of time) into the Ansty Stream which naturally could have an effect on properties downstream that were close to this watercourse.

Here is how Tony dealt with the problem of draining Ansty Pond, then removing the silt and effecting repairs.

“There are many springs in the pond which we estimated produced about 1/3 of the entire water volume each day - perhaps more. It thus filled up in about 2 or 3 days. The main problem was keeping the water level down continually to carry out the work. We used pipes as syphons to keep the level down.

The next problem is that there is a huge surge of water downstream while the level is being reduced. You may recall that I used to contact downstream parishioners before carrying out the work to warn you that the water in the stream would rise rapidly. It obviously needs to be done at a steady rate and we used to take several days to get the level down to avoid too many problems downstream.

I did not realise this at the time but was told afterwards that the water surge and particularly the fact that it was muddy/silty water might affect the Nadder and fishing. I did not have any direct complaints from anyone but I had intended to contact Natural England and the fishing clubs if I reduced the level again - but this did not happen before we left.

The next problem was how to get the silt out of the pond without damaging the banks. Also the silt is several feet deep in places and there was concern that a “digger” might get stuck in the silt. It was suggested that a ramp might be built over the bank from the road possibly filling the ditch with sandbags or pipes and with a similar ramp on the pond side but this was rejected as too hazardous for the bank. As there was no other suitable access we used suction tankers situated near the Commandery with huge suction pipes going into the pond.

We had three of these working for almost three weeks one sucking, one going to South Farm to tip the silt and the other returning. It was essential to get the silt into a “sludge” mixture to make this effective and not let it dry out to much. We still only managed to take out about 10 or 20% of the silt - if that!

Finally repairing the stone wall and strengthening the bank were also important and we carried out repairs on many occasions. It was essential to use lime mortar as concrete would make the leaks worse. We also carefully pumped bentonite into the bank. (Bentonite reacts with water to form a clay like texture which possesses adhesive properties))

Old Dougie Lever (The Levers were a very long established Ansty family) told me many years ago that he remembered seeing two other methods of reducing the silt.

There was a sluice in the north bank in the early days which they opened and then men rode up and down the pond on a raft stirring up the mud so that the silt and sludge poured out down the river course. It made a huge mess particularly in the fields where the old mill used to be located (Near Lower Farm) but the lads in the village used to enjoy catching all the eels in the mud and sell them for 6d in Salisbury!

The second method he remembered was having two huge traction engines one at each end but outside of the pond. One was located in the area which is now Sarah Gwinner’s garden near the Maypole and the other in the front garden of the Manor near the church. These two engines were connected with a massive long belt (or perhaps strong wire) which had a large “bucket” connected. This bucket was dragged across the pond and then emptied at each end. It would have been amazing to watch that happen!”

Perhaps villagers in Ansty today will take the same interest in watching what happens when Mr and Mrs Morgan’s Ansty Pond renovation project gets under way: part of the continuum that links the past with the future.

