

Sherborne St. John Conservation Group
Hearing Statement
Land at Cranesfield, Sherborne St. John
Appeal Ref: APP/H1705/W/23/3327082

An Assessment of Harm to the Historic and Ecological Environment of Sherborne St.
John
&
Medieval Fishponds in the Sherborne St. John Area
Summary Report by the Sherborne St. John Conservation Group

This document should be read in conjunction with:

Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – Bob Edwards, Forum Heritage, Heritage Report
Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – Dr. Paul Sterry, Ecological and Biodiversity Report
Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – Professor Dyer Report
Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – Rupert Willoughby Report
Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – David George, Geology and Hydrology Comment
Sherborne St. John Conservation Group – Robin Chute Comment

Abstract

The significance of fishponds as evidence of medieval manorial economies has been summarised by Professor Dyer. He explains the importance of the Sherborne St. John fishpond as a survival of a medieval archetype comprising of manor, fishpond, church and park. That the Sherborne fishpond was once a moat to a high-status manor is a possibility explored in Mr. Rupert Willoughby's report.

This report by the Sherborne St. John Conservation Group seeks to demonstrate the importance of Sherborne St. John's medieval fishpond to the north Hampshire historical landscape and to give further context to fishponds as signifiers of agricultural and social activity in medieval England. The SSJ fishpond's survival - in remarkable condition and in plain sight – has led to a recent application for it to be listed as a Scheduled Monument by English Heritage (**application ref: 1489050**), joining a central village group consisting of the Grade I St. Andrew's church, Grade II Manor Farm House and the Victorian village school (1850).

The Sherborne St. John Conservation Group believes that setting is essential to our appreciation of these medieval assets, and strongly rejects any assertion that the development on the site poses anything less than significant harm to the historic environment of the Conservation Area of Sherborne St. John.

The group respectfully ask that note be taken of its support of Historic England's rejection of the planning application. The 'historic experience' of the residents of St. John would be significantly impacted by the construction of housing on a site that imposes on cemetery, medieval fishpond, footpaths and churchyard. No mitigation, no matter how considered, could lessen the significant harm and damage that construction on this site would cause.

The insertion of built form on this site would forever close off the **last surviving long-countryside views to and from** the church. For at least 1,000 years St. Andrew's has been a rural church and parish.

We would ask that flooding and run-off be considered on a site that slopes to the fishpond corner. The clear water of Sherborne St. John's **chalk feeder streams** is its defining feature.

Finally, may we draw your attention to the ecological report of Dr. Paul Sterry. Dr. Sterry has outlined the impact fragmentation and pollution would have on the rich biodiversity that occupies the pond, cemetery, church, farmland, stream, and trees that border the site. Avians, mammals, reptiles – they use the conservation area (and broader zones of influence) with its water, tree belts and hedgerows as places to feed, breed and shelter. Dr. Sterry remarks: *Historically, the way land was farmed, and hedgerows, tree belts and freshwater were managed, inadvertently created the biodiversity richness that was present in the landscape.* Fish farming, agriculture, hedgerows, and the legacy of manorial park and ancient meadow combine in this corner of the village – to upset this combination would have irreversible and devastating ecological consequences.



Pictures show the tree-belt margins south and east of the proposed development, and the stream exit to fishpond (fishponds require both entry and exit streams, at this size of waterbody they function as lakes).

Urban intrusion to block off the last views between the historic centre of the village (church, fishpond and manor) and its countryside setting would irreparably damage residents' and visitors'

experience of 1,000 years of Sherborne St. John's and St. Andrew's evolutionary history as a rural parish.



View to site (with visiting swans)

Medieval Fishponds and Historic England

The number of fishponds and moats listed as Scheduled Monuments amounts to 705 [Historic England search of moats and ponds](#) – these are significant historical assets.

The recent identification of a large and well-preserved fishpond in Sherborne St. John by Professor Dyer and Rupert Willoughby heightens the importance of the Conservation Area of the village.

The extract below is from a Historic England *Scheduled Monument* listing explaining the significance of a medieval fishpond to a manorial site:

A fishpond is an artificially created pool of slow-moving freshwater constructed for the purpose of cultivating, breeding and storing fish to provide a constant and sustainable supply of food. They may be dug into the ground, embanked above ground level, or formed by placing a dam across a narrow valley. Groups of up to twelve ponds variously arranged in a single line or in a cluster and joined by leats have been recorded. The ponds may be of the same size or of several different sizes with each pond being stocked with different species or ages of fish. The size of the pond was related to function, with large ponds thought to have had a storage capability whilst smaller, shallower ponds were used for fish cultivation and breeding. Fishponds were maintained by a water management system which included inlet and outlet channels carrying water from a river or stream, a series of sluices set into the bottom of the dam and along the channels and leats, and an overflow

leat which controlled fluctuations in water flow and prevented flooding. Buildings for use by fishermen or for the storage of equipment, and islands possibly used for fishing, wildfowl management or as shallow spawning areas, are also recorded. The tradition of constructing and using fishponds in England began during the medieval period and peaked in the 12th century. They were largely built by the wealthy sectors of society with monastic institutions and royal residences often having large and complex fishponds. The difficulties of obtaining fresh meat in the winter and the value placed on fish in terms of its protein content and as a status food may have been factors which favoured the development of fishponds and which made them so valuable. The practice of constructing fishponds declined after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century although in some areas it continued into the 17th century. Most fishponds fell out of use during the post-medieval period although some were re-used as ornamental features in 19th and early 20th century landscape parks or gardens, or as watercress beds. Documentary sources provide a wealth of information about the way fishponds were stocked and managed. The main species of fish kept were eel, tench, pickerel, bream, perch, and roach. Large quantities of fish could be supplied at a time. Once a year, probably in the spring, ponds were drained and cleared.

Historic England is clear about its role [About Historic England](#). As an organisation, it exists **‘to protect, champion and save the places that define who we are and where we've come from as a nation. We care passionately about the stories they tell, the ideas they represent and the people who live, work and play among them.’**

The ‘stories’ that this ‘place’ can tell, at the heart of a village that existed in Anglo-Saxon times are rich and complex, as Professor Dyer and Rupert Willoughby have demonstrated. Village eyes have been opened to the significance of the Sherborne St. John pond which though much loved by the community has not been properly understood until recently. It is not a ‘village’ or ‘farm’ pond but a fishpond and historic monument, as important a record of medieval life as the church it borders. Work and prayer, control, and status – these are the tales of the Sherborne St. John fishpond, manor and church.

To the west lies the Cemetery, given by the Chute family, the last residents of the Vyne, as a war memorial. It tells its own story of a village shattered by loss in the war years 1914-18. The subsequent breakup of the Vyne’s ancient estate, first by an estate sale in 1919, then by managed decline until what was left was handed to the care of the National Trust in 1956, is a story that demands telling.

Our historical experience remembering the dead of the village and a war that caused so much upheaval to 20th-century rural life is one that should continue to be felt. These are lessons as important to future generations as those of the past. For the past 100 years the village has remembered its war dead in the tranquil setting of the Cemetery.



Gaps in the tree belt increase the impact on the historic setting of the Cemetery and War Memorial. The views across countryside to Wey Brook would be lost to those who enjoy the tranquillity of this heritage asset. No proposal could mitigate this loss.

Light, noise, suburban encroachment, closing the last surviving church-to-countryside views that the villagers of Sherborne St. John have enjoyed for 1,000 years – these are significant harms.

Additionally, given what we now understand as the importance of the fishpond, we would respectfully ask the threat of water eutrophication be considered, the consequence of nitrate and toxic run-off which no mitigation methods could fully prevent if development were allowed on the site. The proposed site slopes downwards to drain into the fishpond. Local knowledge of the area (supported by the OS flood map) makes clear that the area is prone to flooding. View north-south along eastern boundary clearly shows the south-east slope.



Flood area – pond corner



View of slope



View of incline (slope) to the south east of the site

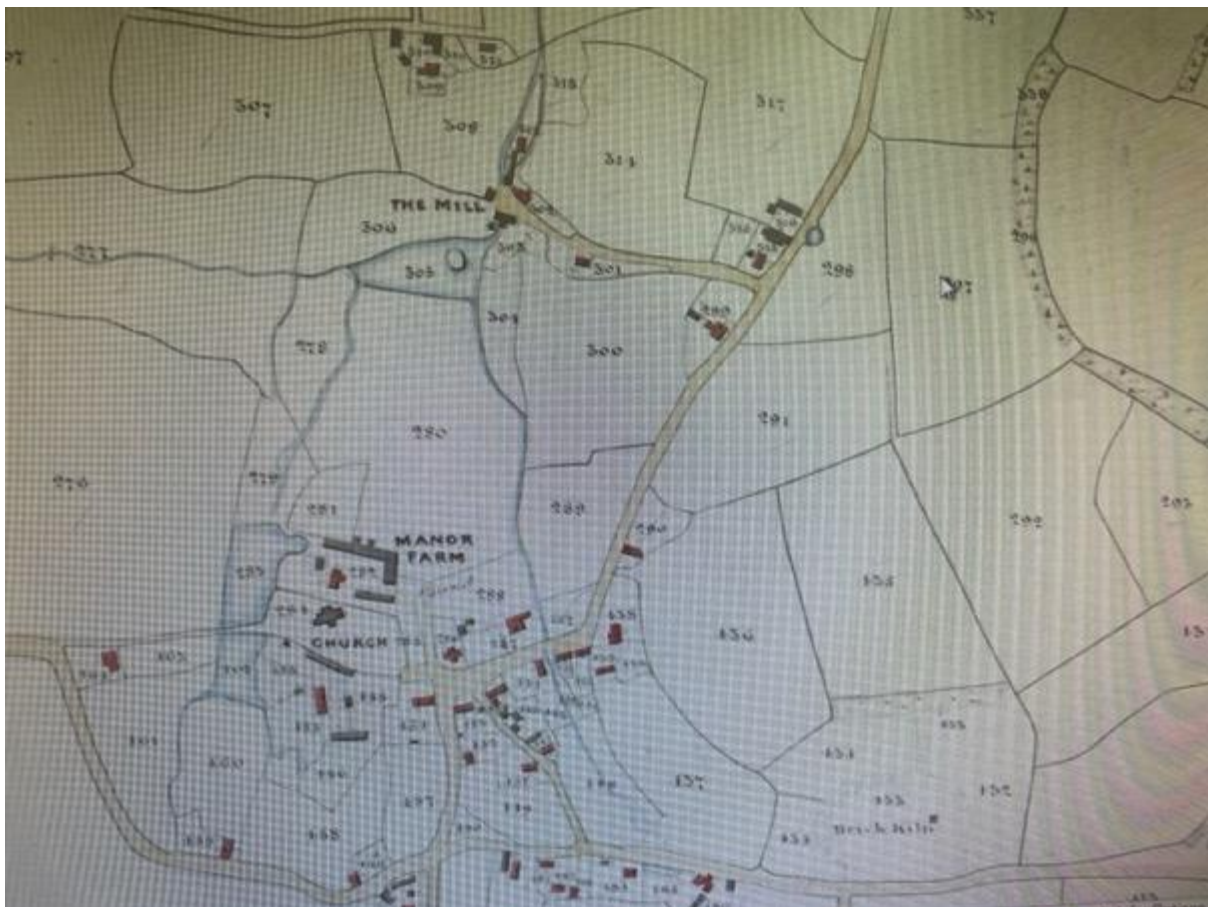
Mr. Willoughby notes that Sherborne St. John is ‘as old as any community in England’, that it takes its name from the Saxon ‘Scir bourn’ or bright stream. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book [Sherborne St. John entry, Domesday Book](#) as having a population of 40 households in 1086, putting it ‘in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday’. In 1086 Sherborne St. John

contained a ‘Meadow 20 acres. 3 mills, value 1 pound 7 shillings and 5 pence. 1 church. 0.5 church lands.’



Domesday entry

Today, a population of 2,484 still enjoy a connection of church, meadow, mill pond and mill house, as well as the ‘bright streams’ of the village’s Saxon past. To the north, the views are still of an agricultural landscape –as they have been for past generations.



Tithe map, 1840. The tithe map makes clear that the views from church and Manor Farm looked over arable land. In 1919, when the Chutes sold large parts of the estate, they reserved land to the other side of the medieval fishpond as a gift to the rector of the

parish for use as a war memorial and cemetery. The shape of the fishpond with the protrusion to the right gives weight to Mr. Willoughby's suggestion (supported by longstanding oral tradition) of a substantial manor house on the site of Manor Farm House, possibly moated. Moated structures in the area include Beaurepaire, the manor house of the medieval Vine (sic) (remains of moat), Wyford Farm, Pamber Priory and Clapper's Farm (moat only).

The network of walks that Sherborne St. John's villagers and visitors enjoy is one that has been accessed by past generations as the footpaths marked on the 1877 OS map demonstrate (see below). The connections between church and landscape setting are clear from the footpaths marked in yellow. Building to the south and west of the village in the 20th century has cut off views from these directions, leaving views of the church only from the north (marked in purple). From the church, views extend towards the Wey Brook - as they have done for a millennium.



1877 OS Map -footpaths in yellow, viewpoints towards church marked in purple, views out from churchyard and Church Path marked in green.



Building on this sensitive site would cut into the long views of the site, alienating the heritage asset of the church from its Wey Brook footpath views.



The connection between churchyard (west) and countryside beyond in mid-summer

Medieval fishponds and moats in the vicinity of Sherborne St. John (North Hampshire)

The condition of the medieval fishponds and moats in the close vicinity of Sherborne St. John varies:

Appendix 1 (see below report)

- 1) The fishpond at **Morgaston Wood** is empty (1.4 km distant). Though overgrown, it is possible to see the old form of the pond and earthworks. See images 1-5.
- 2) Part of the fishponds and moat at **Pamber Priory** (3km distant) hold water. Overgrown, but outlines and earthworks visible. In the 1980s the remains of what the farmer believed to be an old fishpond to the north were partly excavated to hold water for all the year. See images 6-11.
- 3) The earthworks of a moated manor at **Sherborne Cowdray** (later the Vine (sic)) (2km distant) western arm and part of the north and south arms only survive under pasture with the moat itself scrub-covered part filled with water. No public access but visible from the road behind hedgerows. See images 13-16.
- 4) The fishponds at the **Vyne** (2 km distant) were united in the 18th century to form a single lake. See images 17-18.
- 5) **Wyeford Farm's** fishponds (4.5 km distant) were considerably altered in the 17th century to create formal canals for its gardens. See images 19-20. Access limited to footpath.
- 6) The fishponds at **Beaurepaire Park** (5.5 km distant) (privately owned and not accessible to the public) are ones to which the Manor Farm House pond is comparable. They are first recorded in 1369-70. This holding was alienated from the **manor of Sherborne St. John** to Bartholomew Peche early in the reign of Henry III (1216-72), a link that might be more than coincidental. See images 20-21.
- 7) **Clapper's Farm** (8.2 km distant)— an example of a moat that has lost its building. Of great historic and aesthetic interest, but on private land so not accessible. See images 23 -24.

Professor Dyer's research gives a construction date of the Sherborne St. John pond as probably 12th or 13th century. The Professor notes that the Sherborne fishpond is recorded in 1302 and was likely built by a member of either the Port or St John families. (See attachment report, Professor Dyer).

Two water-mills and a fishpond in Sherborne St. John are mentioned in the inquisition on the death of John de St. John in 1302. (fn. 42) This fishpond was not included in the lease of the manor to Edward de St. John in 1329, but continued in possession of John de St. John.

From *Victoria County History 'Parishes: Sherborne St. John'*, in *A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 4*, ed. William Page (London, 1911), pp. 158-171

For research on the moated residences in the Loddon area, of particular note is Dr. Paul Stamper's PhD thesis submitted to the University of Southampton 'Medieval Studies in Landscape History (1983)'. [197870.pdf \(soton.ac.uk\)](#). We are grateful to Dr. Stamper for permission to quote from his work. The drawings attached to local sites in this report are Dr. Stamper's. Dr. Stamper has further informed us of the complexity of medieval fish farming in fishponds: in summary *fish were valuable commodities -they could be moved from site to site for stocking/ reducing numbers if stored in barrels of wet grass, with surviving two days if carefully transported. Medieval fish-farming required ingenuity and experience – as well as being a manorial status symbol and mark of gentility. Fish ponds required management. Eels were farmed*

in millponds but it is highly unlikely that a millpond would be used for farming fish – fishponds required different and sensitive management, born from experience and management.

Mr. Rupert Willoughby's report on the manors of Sherborne sets out the case for a substantial manor house on the site of Manor Farm.

Arguments for preservation of the Sherborne St. John Conservation Area and medieval fishpond from urban encroachment from Cranesfield.

The Manor Farm pond is the finest surviving publicly accessible medieval fishpond in this area. Other local medieval fishponds and moats are either **much altered, empty or on private land and therefore not accessible.**

The Manor Farm fishpond can be seen from the cemetery (which also acts as a protective barrier to 1980s Cranesfield). Through gaps in the tree belt to the north there are views over the site to the woods beyond.

The fishpond can also be seen (with long views beyond) from the churchyard of St. Andrew's (Grade I) and Church Path which is in constant use by the residents of Sherborne St John. Church Path serves a road-free shortcut linking the centre of the village to and from Cranesfield.

The pond is also a quiet place for reflection and is used by families who enjoy feeding the ducks or simply looking at the pond from the bench on Church Path. The cemetery and churchyard provide a tranquil pondside setting for those seeking spiritual refreshment.

Parents and their children going to and from school experience a setting that it has taken at least 1,000 years to create – the fishpond, church, rural views, cemetery and manor farm combine to create a framework through which we can understand the past.

From the cemetery and churchyard the visitor to Sherborne St. John - or the resident – experiences the rural setting of fishpond and church from the footpath network. Our sense of 'place' in Sherborne St. John is bound up by its rural character in this area. We respectfully ask that it is protected for future generations to enjoy.



View from churchyard. For at least 721 years, this has been a view enjoyed by those visiting the churchyard of St. Andrews. (The fishpond is recorded in a document of 1302). Light, pollution, suburban development – all would have a significant and irreversible impact on the visitors' experience of the last rural views from the ancient church of St. Andrew's.



View from Grade II Manor Farm House. The historic setting of a house that occupies an ancient site. Professor Dyer explains in his report how fish from one side of the manor house added variety to a diet of game that was taken from the deer park at the other. Building here would cause irreparable damage to the rural setting that no mitigation could repair.



The shape of the fishpond (an extended rectangle) conforms with the shape of the Morgaston Wood fishpond. Dr. Stamper notes that: 'In all other cases in Hampshire where the shape of the moat is known it is either rectangular or square.' P.101, 1983 He further states 'The result is that the county's moated sites are with the notable exceptions like Clapper's Lane and Bushy Lease generally of poor physical quality. Construction of even the smallest moat involved considerable investment whether in time or money.'



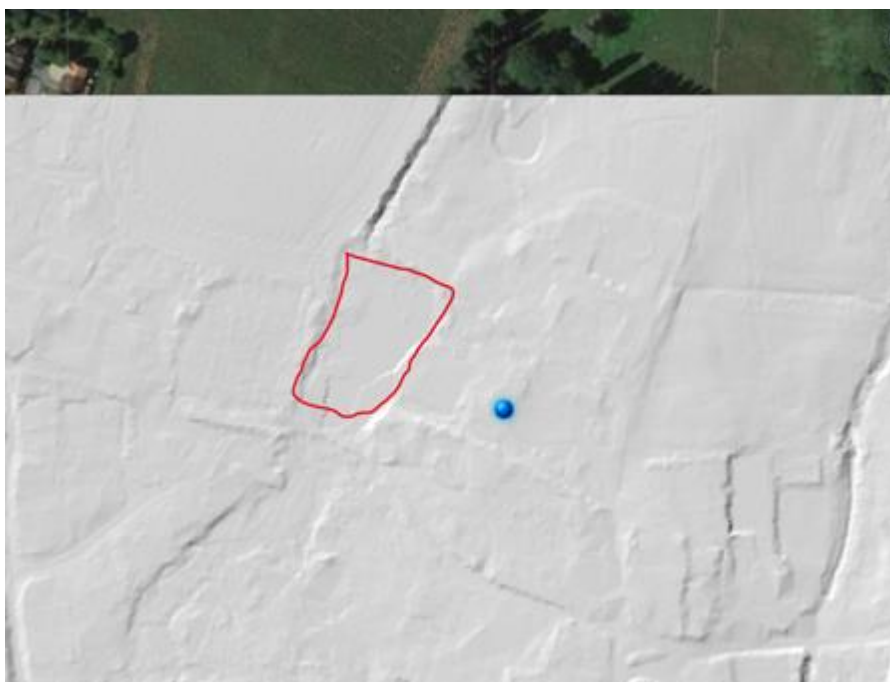
In 2016, excavations laying pipes to the north of the pond in land belonging to Manor Farm Cottage led to the discovery of a medieval gully – this is an unexplored archaeological site. Within living memory, the pond has not been excavated.



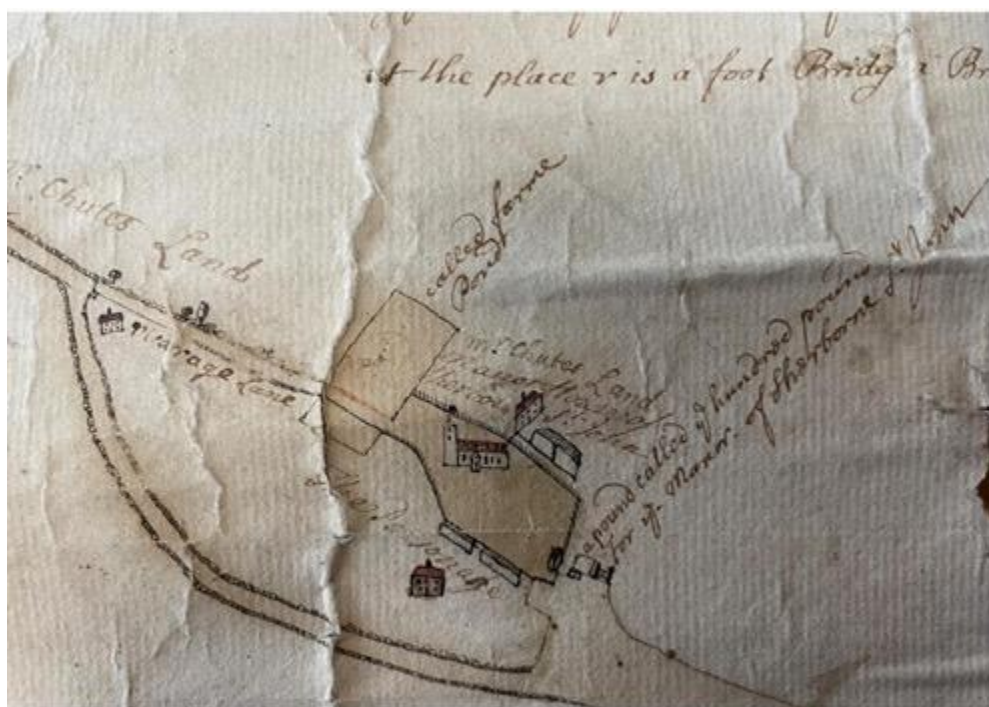
Note the long views from Church Path to the woods far beyond. This is a view enjoyed daily by the residents of Sherborne St. John. Daily, pupils of the school (founded 1850) move back and forth along Church Path – they experience a combination of a natural and man-made environment.



The medieval fishpond of Manor Farm House marked in red (approx. 1.4 km south of the Morgaston Wood fishpond). A public asset – accessible from Church Path, the churchyard and the cemetery. The line marked in yellow shows the extent of public access. An oasis of calm experienced daily by the residents of Sherborne St. John and by its visitors.



Lidar map of the Manor Farm House fishpond. The indents south of the Manor Farm House fishpond (south of Church Path) suggest feeder ponds. These are now wetlands, largely overgrown.



Detail of the 1732 map (Hampshire Record Office, 31 M57/1209), where Manor Farm is described as the 'Manor House of Sherborne St John'. The adjacent church and pond are also marked.

A detail of the estate map of 1732, confirming the historic grouping of manor, church and farm. The shape of the principal double fishpond is the same now as it was three hundred years ago. Lidar, common sense and the shape of other examples of medieval fishponds suggest that this is also the shape of 1302.

Fishponds in the Local Area – Appendix 1

Morgaston Wood (1.4 km distant), part of the Vyne Estate (National Trust)



1. Information panel in Morgaston Wood (National Trust)

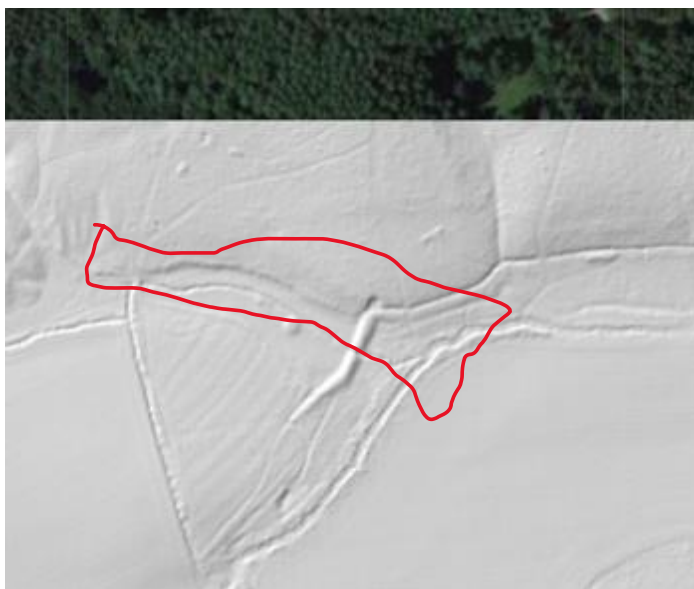


2. Empty fishpond at Morgaston Wood. View from southern earthwork

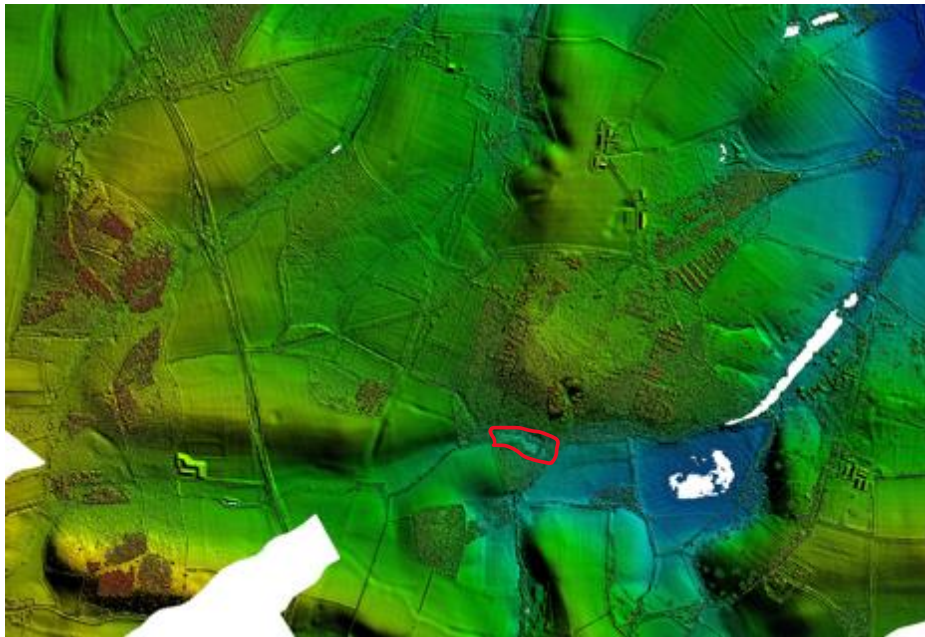


3. The medieval fishpond of Morgaston Wood marked in red (approx. 1 km north of the Manor Farm pond. Though similar in shape to the Manor Farm Pond, the Morgaston Wood fishpond is now empty and overgrown. Nevertheless it is a highlight for visitors to the Vyne [The Vyne's woodland walk | Hampshire | National Trust](#)

Recorded visitor numbers to The Vyne numbered 216,590 in 2020 [Annual Report National Trust](#) , a figure that does not include the tens of thousands who use Morgaston Wood without registering. These visitors often visit Sherborne St. John (the former estate village). The Chutes have been buried in St Andrew's, Sherborne St. John since the 17th century, from the 19th century in a burial plot adjacent to the fishpond. Gifts of the family include the church spire and cemetery.

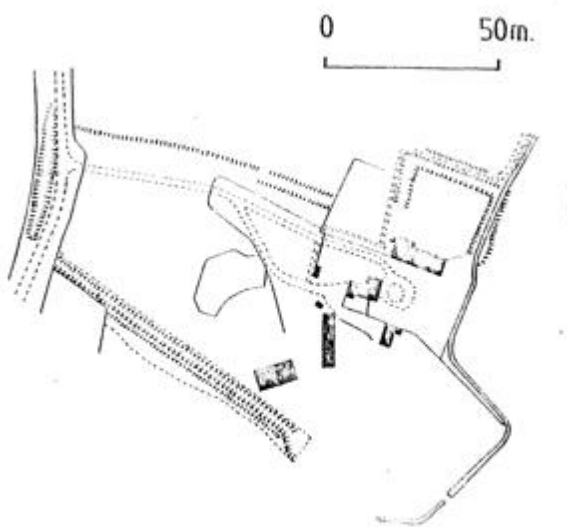


4. Lidar map of the Morgaston Wood fishpond



5. Another LIDAR map of the Vyne with the Morgaston fishpond outlined in red. Note the remains of medieval strip farming to the east of the fishpond, a typical feature of medieval fishponds. Evidence of the place of the Morgaston Wood fishpond once held as part of a broader medieval agricultural economy.

Pamber Priory (moat and fishponds 12th - 14th century)



Plan by Dr. Paul Stamper



6. Pamber Priory with remains of moat to the south



7. Empty moat at Pamber Priory (southern arm)



8. Part-filled stream/moat at Pamber Priory (north/south)



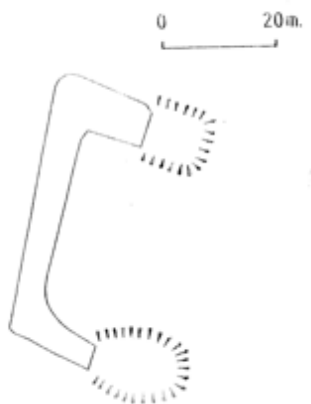
9. Empty moat at Pamber Priory (southern arm)



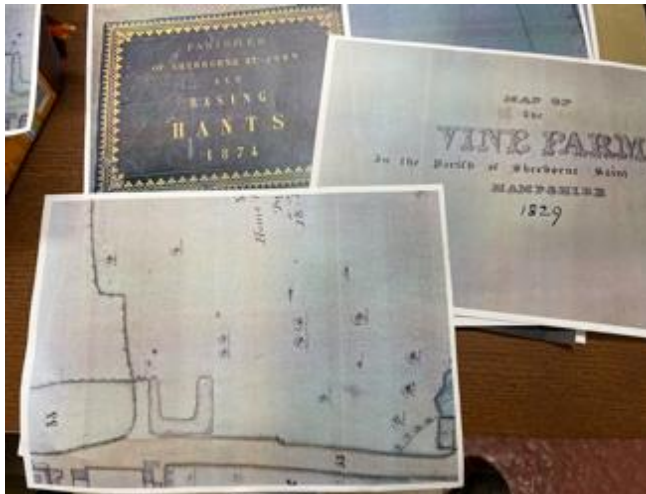
10. Pond at Pamber Priory farm – private land, not accessible (north of Priory), excavated in the 1980s

Manor of Sherborne Cowdray

A moat is noted by Leland in c. 1540 as containing the old manor house before the construction of the Vyne)



(13) Plan by Dr. Paul Stamper



11. Farm map of 1829 showing moat of the Manor of Sherborne Cowdray (later The Vine (sic))



12. Photograph taken from the public road – no pavement. Remains of the moat of Sherborne Cowdray (The Vine (sic))

The Vyne, Hampshire (2 km distant)



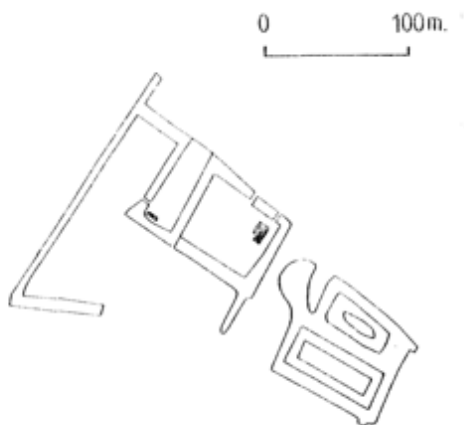
13. The lake of The Vyne was enlarged in the 18th century out of existing fishponds by the then owner John Chute (owner 1754-76) in line with gardening fashions of the day (Capability Brown and others)



14. Aerial view of The Vyne showing the length of the refashioned lake. Circled in yellow is the site of the manor of Sherborne Cowdray contained within its medieval moat (later the Vine (sic))

Wyeford Farm, Tadley (4.5 km distant)

At Wyeford the canals are 'regularly cleaned' – they are believed to be of medieval origin though much altered in the early 17th century to create a network of fashionable garden canals (when the house was much altered). The manor was first recorded in 1166.



Plan by Dr. Paul Stamper

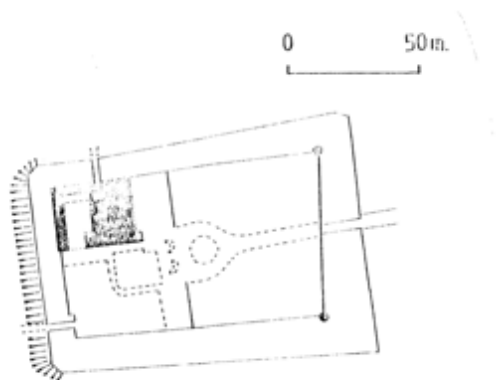


15. Moated Wyford Farm, rebuilt 17th century on a medieval site. Private house with access limited to footpath.



16. One of the canals at Wyford Farm. Probably a largely 17th-century creation, one that made use of existing fishpond networks.

Beaurepaire Park (ponds first recorded 1369-70) (5.5 km distant)



Plan by Dr. Paul Stamper



17. Fishponds and moat at Beaurepaire (private land, not publicly accessible)

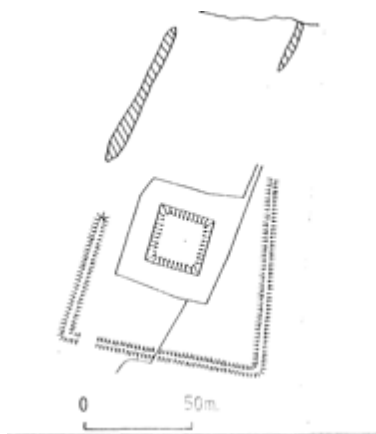


18. Beaurepaire Park lies just 6 miles north of Basingstoke. The house dates from the 18th century but the estate is recorded as being first owned by the St John family during the reign of Henry III. The house suffered considerable damage during the Civil War and the hands of the Roundheads before it was later rebuilt in 1777. (Arabella Youens, Country Life, July 2010)

Henry III's dates 1216-1272. The St. John family were owners of the manor of Sherborne St. John at this time. Mr. Willoughby has argued that there might have been a moated manor house on the Manor Farm House site.

Clapper's Farm, Silchester (8.2 km distant)

The manor, divided at Domesday, as its overlordship was to be for most of the medieval period, was held by the Bluets and then the Cusances between 1086 and the later fourteenth century. (25) The enclosed area of the moat is rather small, and this would favour the possibility that this was the site of a park lodge. However, as the manor was at times divided it is possible that the moat was the site of a seigneurial residence, the main manorial site being within the Roman walled town. "Clapper's" is the name of the modern farm close to the site. In 1358 land called 'la mote' or 'le veil Vy(nes?)' were noted in Silchester. Dr. Paul Stamper



Plan by Dr. Paul Stamper



19. Moat at Clapper's Farm (not publicly accessible, private land)



20. Moat at Clapper's Farm (not publicly accessible, private land)