

139 Sherbourne and Silent Pool by Trevor Brook.mp3

(Video also available for Members)

There is a set of 102 slides accompanying this talk.

In the days when this little hut still survived, the footpath completely encircling the pool was not closed off and before a large industrial building appeared on the hill to the left, The Silent Pool was a quiet and rather magical place.

Between Guildford and Dorking, Silent Pool is just one mile down the hill from Newlands Corner. The Sand Pit is what used to be Weston Wood.

The stream and the road running south from Silent Pool are The Sherbourne Brook and Sherbourne Lane.

Photographed in 1902, Frith had this lovely Silent Pool postcard showing the hut reflected in the still waters.

Sixty years later, they repeated the image with this second postcard, photographed in 1965.

This card by Percy Lloyd of Albury features his own children.

It shows the footpath which traditionally reached all the way around Silent Pool.

It has been closed off for years as supposedly unsafe.

Before the one way system, this was the Silent Pool junction into Sherbourne Lane in 1985.

On the left is a poster advertising Blackheath Village Fair on the May Day Bank Holiday.

Stripped of the Weston Wood trees the exposed yellow sandpit hill is visible in the distance, while in front is an extensive new planting of young saplings.

This is looking down Sherbourne Lane in the 1970s.

The hedge along the left side does not yet exist and down near the bottom there is Wood Lodge...

Here's a closer view of Wood Lodge, in April 1985...

Wood Lodge, the police cottage, had been pulled down and rebuilt around 1900.

The last village policeman was Jack Ashcroft, who lived here with his wife and daughter Diane.

Sherbourne Brook joins the Tillingbourne just by the bridge and the old pumping hut and then continues flowing towards the west.

"PRIVATE – NO FISHING"

Sherbourne Pond was natural. To provide more consistent water for Albury, in 1662 it was dug out, lined with clay and extended.

A new dam separated the pond in two, with the upper later becoming called The Silent Pool, the name created by Martin Tupper.

The large flat field, with the Pilgrims' Way running through, was where Sherbourne Palm Spring Fair was held.

The Silent Pool lies on chalk, observable at the northern end of the pond. The lower Sherbourne Pond lies mainly on gault clay, while its northern end and the stream connecting the two ponds together lie on upper greensand.

Silent Pool Spring is the only major spring source in the 17km scarp slope of the North Downs between the Wey and Mole valleys. It discharges between 1 and 10 megalitres, up to 2.2 million

gallons, per day into Silent Pool; and the lake water exhibits crystal clear blue opalescence characteristic of chalk spring-fed ponds.

A survey in 2006 suggested that the northern half, by the spring, is of natural origin with the southern half being dug out at the same time as Sherbourne Pond was created in 1662. The natural pond was made deeper and lined with clay when the southern half, lined with clay and heather, was added.

In *Highways and Byways in Surrey*, Eric Parker describes what it was like in 1870:

"You will spy a cottage, the gate of which bears the legend 'Key of the Pool kept here.' How should a pool have a key? It turns out to be two keys, one of a padlock shutting an iron gate leading to a grove of box trees; you shut the padlock and find that you have left all who come after you and on Saturdays there are many, to climb the fence.

The Silent Pool, when I saw it first, a little disappointed me. I ought to have known that it would, because everybody could tell me where it was, even quite unintelligent people walking about the road two miles away...

"I think I hoped the pool would be, not only solitary and sequestered, but entirely deserted by human beings ; a pool on which you came suddenly, lying hidden in the heart of chalky dells dark green with box trees; it was to be as deep as a well, and cold with the coldness of a spring; smelling, too, of bitter wet box and sun-warmed chalk.

It was to be a pool at the side of which the stranger should seat himself and discover the air of the place so quiet and enchanted that he could hear no sound of birds or beasts or men; only, perhaps, the melodious drip of the rain-heavy boughs into the clear peacock-green depths of water.

"And, in fact, the disappointment is that this is precisely what the Silent Pool might be. It is what it used to be but so many people have heard of it and have come on bicycles and in carriages and motor-cars to see it, that the leaf-strewn paths are trampled into mud round it; and it cannot be called silent, for you will not escape hearing other people, who have quite as much right as you to be there, talk about it and tramp round its margin.

Then, too, for the convenience of visitors, there has been built on the edge of the...

"pool a thatched arbour of wood, into which you admit yourself with a very large key, only to be deafened on the spot by ten thousand cockney names scrawled on the white walls round you. Those who have gibbeted themselves on the walls have also thrown the newspapers that held their lunch into the water, and bottles with the paper, a most unhappy spectacle. Only in one particular has the arbour any claim on the wayfarer's gratitude...

"It enables him to watch the large trout which swim in the clear deep water under him as closely as if they were behind the glass of an aquarium. Trout which leap out of the water every two minutes in a spring afternoon, and yet which are tame enough to come and be fed under the rail of a wooden arbour by trooping visitors, are a sight for idle fishermen to see.

I have fed them with worms, but I suspect them to be better used to sandwiches."

This is a still of the trout in the 1956 film, *Pilgrims' Way*.

By the time cars were around the cottage, which had become a tea room, had been enlarged. This postcard and the next one were taken at the same time...

With the same car but the addition of two children in this version.

On the other side of the main road, in the early days of the Sand Pit, there was also Brickyard Cottage, nowadays Timber Croft, beside a brickworks and with its own nearby pond.

Starting in 1961, archaeological excavations were made in Weston Wood, before the area was destroyed by the gradually expanding sand pit.

This Percy Lloyd postcard from around 1920 shows the woodland which had covered Weston Wood, before the sandpit extended and destroyed it all.

One writer says: *"The circular mound in Weston Wood is a round platform, about 5 feet high and about 135 feet in diameter. Its origin is mysterious, but it stands close to an old road and may therefore be pre-mediaeval. Nearby, in a field off Sherborne Lane, Manning and Bray record standing stones or the remains of a circle. The coincidence is too great to be ignored. Albury must then have had fertility rites of its own."*

So, during the 1960s, Joan Harding, of the Surrey Archaeological Society, led two major digs on the hilltop of Weston Wood.

There are several black and white photographs as well as colour slides of the project.

Joan Harding described a small homestead on the sheltered greensand slope in Weston Wood. The spring below provided water, the North Downs the flint for tools and the gault the clay for pottery. The excavation uncovered a circular house, 20 feet in diameter which is usual in the few Late Bronze Age sites recorded in Southern England.

Two small cultivated plots round the house may have grown the grain which was found in a storage jar in a pit. The grain was radio-carbon dated to 510BC.

It is a site of importance because it is the first complete Late Bronze Age homestead to have been excavated in Surrey.

It is a one-period site, so everything found belongs to this period.

It is undisturbed, so the flint tools are in excellent condition.

Here is Joan Harding, in yellow, showing the bronze age village to Dame Kathleen Kenyon, the Head of Archaeology at University College London

Weston Wood was a Neolithic pottery manufacturing site and much broken pottery was found.

Some of the finds included this cylindrical loom weight at the top and two complete spindle-whorls.

This is one of the test pits which led to a fantastic number of pottery finds, both broken and complete.

The vast sandpit which completely engulfed Weston Wood had started a hundred years earlier as this modest quarry, painted by George Vicat Cole around 1860.

Surrey Archaeological Society excavations in 1961 by Viscountess Hanworth and F A Hastings suggested a date for the mound between 1701 to 1800, possibly an ornamental 18th century mound.

By 1998, in this photo, Weston Wood Platform Mound round barrow was just on the point of being demolished and lost for ever.

There has long been speculation about a supposed stone circle in the Sherbourne area, mentioned in 1809 by Manning and Bray in 'The History and Antiquities of Surrey', as follows:

'In the field are five stones, three together, the other two a small distance apart. The largest of the three is 10 foot long, 5'8" wide, and four foot four inches out of the ground. One in the next field is 10'10" by 4'9" and flat to the ground.'

166 years later, in 1975, R.C. Walmsley, along with Dr Maurice Burton of Albury History Society, made this map showing the apparent original and final positions of seven surviving stones.

Bob Casbard photographed the extant stones, including the one which is just along the path from Timber Croft Cottage.

Three Surrey Churches, by Ware & Palmer of 1900, has a chapter on St Martha's including the following tantalising references:

"To the east of the hill, on the rising ground of Weston Wood, towards Sherborne Springs, lie huge boulders, foreign to this part of England, relics of a cromlech."

Similar remains once existed near Albury Rectory, and a mass of rock in Colyer's Hanger, on the hillside, probably marks the site of a third."

Ley Lines Decoded website claims:

"There do indeed appear to have been stones in the field south of the road opposite the entrance to the Silent Pool, but they have been destroyed by successive farmers and various pieces are scattered in the area'.

"The fields in question belong to the Duke of Northumberland's Albury Estate and lie between the large landfill site on the west and Sherbourne Lane on the east, with the A25 road from Guildford to Dorking on the north side.

Until a few years ago these fields were open pasture but intensive tree planting has taken place to screen the landfill from view, and this activity may well have destroyed any evidence of the circle. In these fields was held the Sherborne Palm Sunday fair, which may have a pagan origin, until 1811 when the Rector William Polhill banned it.

Just across the A25 is the Silent Pool, steeped in legend and reputed to be bottomless, although the bottom was revealed in the drought of 1976."

Well, that's Ley Lines Decoded.

In the mid 1800s one large stone was made into a feature at Albury House, Martin Tupper's home, here in a stereoscopic photograph.

Surrey Archaeology stated that such stones, far from being 'foreign to this part of England', were available locally. Perhaps this stone had been transported to Albury House from the Sherbourne area?

Zooming in...

there is the stone next to Mr and Mrs Tupper. It also appears from a different angle in the lower photograph, a detail from Martin Tupper's notepaper with a horseman beside it.

Not of Stonehenge proportions but still a quite sizeable rock.

Well, after all that speculation, here is definite proof of Neolithic activity,

This wonderful 200mm long polished axe head was found when the smaller, western, Weston Fishery lake was dredged in the 1990s.

Around 1780, Finch's map shows the Sherbourne field as owned by William Man Godshall.

This was the location for Sherbourne Palm Sunday Fair.

Before Sherbourne Lane was built, this map also shows the original road, which went through the farmyard of Cookes Place.

In 1823, a writer in The Gentleman's Magazine mentioned a ritual in the late 1700s. After describing how water from Silent Pool fed the gardens of Albury House, by passing along the channel created by Henry Howard, the writer says: *"when he was young, the pond was visited by young people on Palm Sunday carrying branches of willow and cups of sugar which they mixed with water and then drank."*

Surrey Archaeology noted: *"A poem by Albury schoolmaster Mr Lovell in 1854 suggests the Sherbourne water was held sacred by the pagan priests of Roman times. He adds that people used to go to Sherbourne not only to "pluck its palms" but also to buy a mug of Roman water.*

Historian Olive Heath related that: *"an old parishioner of this parish told me many years ago that his grandfather said 'in old times there used to be dancin' and fiddlin' on that there mound'".*

"This fair was of ancient, and possibly of pagan, origin, though an effort seems to have been made to turn it into Christian channels.

Great crowds used to gather at Sherborne for the Palm Sunday Fair, and there were games and dancing and many other forms of amusement.

This went on till 1811, and then, on the representations of the Rector, the Fair was prohibited.

A cromlech which stood near Sherborne is said to have once been the site of the Sherborne Fair...

"After Sherborne Palm Sunday Fair was stopped by the Rector in 1811, he instituted a May Day Fair, which was held in Weston Street, now Albury village, and he gave a maypole, which was set up outside Pratt's Stores. This Fair seems to have spread from the bridge over the stream, along the village street and into the field behind the Bakery.

"There were stalls, games and sports. One of the games played has the appearance of being ancient: it was called "Tingling" — one man had a bell and ran in and out of a ring of people, pursued by others who were blindfolded. A man with a sack of sawdust tripped up anyone who was getting too near the bellman by throwing down the sack, which they fell onto."

The maypole was recorded as still standing in 1911.

William Polhill was rector of Albury for 42 years, until he died at the age of 85...

Miss Louisa Bray, in her Recollections of 1857 wrote:

"Mr. Polhill was a good specimen of the old-fashioned race of clergy now extinct.

He and his wife were perfect pictures in their neat and pretty personage, and when on Sundays, he descended from his respectable chariot in his full-bottomed powdered wig, dingle hat and flowing silk gown, and walked up the Churchyard with his lady by his side dressed in white with black silk cloak, he made a most imposing figure to my mind.

Yet his teaching was not such as I should value now, and he did not scruple in his younger days to join the Hunt on his sleek steed, which was used for farm work and riding in the week, and with its companion drew the couple to church on Sundays. They were thoroughly respected."

This is a Silent Pool painting by Ben Mackay. The poet Edward Thomas, who was killed in the Battle of Arras in 1917, had visited in 1914:

"I went to see the Silent Pool. Until it has been seen, everything is in the name. I had supposed it circular, tenebrous, and deep enough to be the receptacle of innumerable romantic skeletons. It is, in fact, an oblong pond of the size of a swimming bath, overhung on its two long sides and its far, short side, by ash trees. Its unrippled lymph, on an irregular chalk bottom of a singular pallid green, was so clear and thin that it seemed not to be water...

"It concealed nothing. A few trout glided here and there over the chalk or the dark green weed tufts. It had no need of romantic truth or fiction. Its innocent lucidity fascinated me."

This drawing of Silent Pool by Lewis Pinhorn Wood was 25 years earlier, in 1888.

Artists regularly came here.

This photograph is an early albumen print of Silent Pool

Here is Silent Pool Cottage operating as a Tea Room, now with tables both inside and out, all with waitress service.

Later, with the dustbin advertising Walls ice cream, this is how the tea shop looked in 1976.

Next door, this was Sherbourne Farm in 1976...

And how the farm's granary looked at that time...

Here are some of their new-born lambs out in the field... and being fed, in the yard...

And this was the Sherbourne Farm cartshed.

Silent Pool, with unbelievably beautiful manicured foliage in this card, became THE most painted and photographed place.

The attractive diamond shaped wooden panel at the centre of the hut, and its reflection, shows quite well in this postcard.

This is an early colour postcard, from 1917, using the Photochrom process.

Water supplies had been an issue in 1899, when the Daily Telegraph reported:

"The Woking Water Company proposes to ask Parliament for powers to sink wells into the green sand at Albury and Farley-heath, and grave fears are entertained that this will not only tap the sources of the Tillingbourne, but also ruin the famous "Silent Pool," which is annually visited by many tourists.

"The beauties of this resort have been celebrated by prose-writers and poets from Tennyson to Tupper and has also figured in not a few novels as the trysting-place for heroes and heroines...

The bill is meeting with the most strenuous opposition, among those who are ranging themselves against it being the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Farrer, Lord Ashcombe, Lord Rendel, Lord Justice Vaughan-Williams, Mr W J Evelyn (of Wotton House), and Mr R M Bray, Q.C., all of whom live in the district."

There were fewer objections to another local intrusion in 1940.

This south-facing pillbox was built above Silent Pool as part of the GHQ defence line.

It was constructed from shuttered concrete with brick facing. Nearby, there is a platform and metal mounting for a spigot mortar.

Anti-tank spigot mortar guns looked like this.

In 1858, Martin Tupper had published 'Stephan Langton or The Last Days of King John'. The

illustration of 'The Twin Tombs' shows two stone coffins at St Martha's Church.

There are many versions of the Tragedy of Silent Pool myth, about a woodcutter's daughter. This summary in 1909 is by Eric Parker:

"The Sherborne ponds lie somewhere near the track of the pilgrims, and I like to think that the journeying men knew them and drank their clear water. Legend has grown round the deeper, upper pool. Martin Tupper, in his strange medley Stephan Langton, has shaped it into his story."

Stephan Langton was Archbishop around 1200. He defended the church against both the papacy and King John.

Langton acted as intermediary in negotiations which led to the signing of Magna Carta at Runnymede.

The prolific Victorian author, Martin Farquhar Tupper had become famous for his book 'Proverbial Philosophy' which sold many thousands.

He became a contender for Poet Laureate but was passed over for Lord Alfred Tennyson.

Tupper lived half a mile away, at Albury House, which featured, with its stone, on his own notepaper.

Initially the story, set in England and France, focussed on King John and church affairs.

This drawing is titled 'The Prelate and the King'.

This illustration in the first edition is entitled 'The Churl and the Prince'.

Later editions made more of King John's wickedness in carrying off maidens.

In these book covers he is being punched by a local.

Even later editions acquired the additional subtitle on the cover: 'A Romance of the Silent Pool'.

Eric Parker continued: *"A lovely peasant girl used to bathe in the pool.*

She was a nut-brown maid with ruddy cheeks and coal-black eyes and hair...

"King John, riding by, saw her and drove his horse at her, and she, trying to escape, fell into deep water and was drowned.

"That was not enough for Martin Tupper; he decided that her brother should try to rescue her and be drowned also.

"There they lay, the two of them; "the brother and sister are locked in each other's arms in the tranquil crystal depth of Shirebourne Pond; and the rippled surface is all smooth once more; and you may see the trout shoaling among the still green weeds around that naked raven-haired Sabrina, and her poor drowned brother in his cowskin tunic."
So wrote Tupper; a most moving finish of the chapter."

Well, a fine story and all very tragic... but not something that could even have happened in the hot summer drought of 1976. when Silent Pool shockingly almost vanished. This has become increasingly common in recent decades.

With seemingly no evidence in reality, one story still survived in 1994, when Tony Ellis wrote to the folklore magazine, Touchstone, stating: *"A stone in Weston Wood, marking the graves of a legendary brother and sister drowned in the Silent Pool, has been removed."*

Here's a photo taken by Ted Edward Jauncey showing a peaceful Silent Pool in the autumn of 1950. Tupper's fiction had the good barons who tried to moderate King John's excesses, meeting in a cave beneath Reigate Castle, which is probably why that is known as Barons' Cave.

The poet Alfred Lord Tennyson liked the Surrey countryside and admired Silent Pool. It is possible the description of: *"The black and silent pool above"* in his narrative poem The Miller's Daughter was inspired by the look of Silent Pool.

Artists took to the place.

This postcard published by C.W. Faulkner Ltd. comes from the 1910s.

Around 30 years earlier, in 1878, Helen Mary Elizabeth Allingham painted this watercolour by Silent Pool which she called Figures in a Lane.

The mother and baby are talking to another woman just over the fence.

Helen Allingham lived in Sandhills, near Witley, and also painted several scenes in Shere.

This delightful little painting is titled The Silent Pool, Albury, The Wishing Well, 1882

It was made by 16 year old Eveline C Burne, of the Catholic Apostolic Church Byrne family, and sent to a Mr Arthur Gray in 1884 with the message:

"With best wishes and many hopes that the wish he made under such difficulties has come true."

Six years later, in 1890, that same Eveline Burne, now 24 years old, qualified at the Royal Hospital for Children in Edinburgh and was registered as a nurse, living with her family at Haredene on Albury Heath.

Silent Pool by James S Ogilvy in his 'A Pilgrimage in Surrey', published in 1914, just before the First World War.

Here is a vintage artist postcard of Silent Pool by A. Nelson Mapple.

This was published by Biddles Ltd. of Guildford, around 1920.

From the same period, here's an oil painting by the artist Edwin Francis, visiting from his home in Tunbridge Wells.

Photographic postcards gradually took over from painted images.

Silent Pool of course...

And its famous small hut.

Being a reasonable walk from Gomshall station, Silent Pool was the initial tourist attraction until motoring became popular, which allowed Newlands Corner to come into its own.

The higher Silent Pool itself is formed by the only natural spring between the Wey and Mole valleys. Slightly lower down there is this pool: Sherbourne Pond, the one created by building a new dam in 1662 to provide a larger store of water.

This is a postcard from the Valentines company.

Over 100 Czech refugees, who opposed Nazism and had escaped the takeover of their country by Hitler in 1938 following the Munich Agreement, were living in Albury and visited Silent Pool. This photo was taken by one of them in 1939.

Following Agatha Christie's disappearance in 1926, abandoning her car by Water Lane chalk pit below Newlands Corner, the police had divers explore the Silent Pool. 40 square miles of the Downs were also examined in the massive public search which ensued.

No trout are evident in 1990, but the water is still crystal clear. Foliage is cleared to the left and there is no diamond pattern on this hut. This completely reconstructed version didn't survive for long.

Following ancient stories of a woodcutter's daughter bathing in Silent Pool, there was nudity here more recently. In 2008, the film director Beeban Kidron filmed Hippy Hippy Shake, the story of the 1960s publisher Richard Neville, his girlfriend Louise Ferrier and the trial for distributing an obscene issue of OZ magazine. This was issue number 28, the School Kids issue.

Cillian Murphy starred as Richard Neville, with Sienna Miller as the girlfriend, Louise Ferrier. One reviewer wrote: *"And yes, there is full-frontal nudity from Sienna..."*

"She has a natural, un-made-up look for most of the film, one might even say uglified in places. But when kneeling in a garden drenched in daisies and with a beatific expression on her face, she poses for an 'alternative' Oz centrefold – she is stunningly, stunningly beautiful."

On the other hand, Felix Dennis, who had been one of the editors at OZ and whose home had been raided, wrote in The Times: *"I was eventually, after asking several times, permitted to see a copy of the film, which I think is quite possibly the worst film to be made in the 21st century... an absolute stinker... a dog's breakfast."*

This Working Title Films production has never been released.

Last year, Surrey Archaeological Society dug several test pits in the field to the east of Sherbourne Lane, following clues from this LIDAR survey...

At first sight, the Paddock field looks undisturbed but LIDAR shows evidence of historic human activity.

The road used to run through here before Sherbourne Lane was created.

With Sherbourne Lane in the top left corner again, resistivity surveys in orange show clear results in the field.

Roman pottery and other artifacts have already been found.

For the Millennium, the Albury Trust had a project of planting an avenue of trees, both along the edge of that field and on the other side of Sherbourne Lane.

Here's how they look now, facing south towards the Tillingbourne bridge...

Each of the 70 trees in Millennium Avenue has its sponsor's details displayed on 4 boards. Along with Albury Bellringers, Albury Trust and Albury Produce Association, there is Albury History Society at number 12...

One or two early deaths needed replacing but now, 25 years later, they are all now quite substantial trees.

Here is the view looking north, towards Sherbourne Farm.

Sherbourne Lane, of course, is the home of the Catholic Apostolic Church, built by Henry Drummond, lord of the manor, MP and follower of Edward Irving.

Drummond created this Gothic Revival edifice. It was built from local materials by local craftsmen and opened in 1840.

The twelve church leaders, called Apostles, held meetings, called the Albury Conferences, in the octagonal Chapter House to decide the teachings, liturgies and practices of the church.

The church closed on the death of its final Apostle and is maintained indefinitely, awaiting the second coming of Christ.

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It is believed Augustus Welby Pugin, architect of the Houses of Parliament and the Albury chimneys, designed its rose window.

Woodwork was carved by craftsman Anthony Browne of Little London., including the elaborate pew ends

The drawing shows a design for some of the windows...

Here is a very early photograph of the Apostolic Church, from 1892.

This was looking down on the church in 1994, with the North Downs beyond.

And here's a combine harvester at work in 1994 beside the Catholic Apostolic Church.

Let's end with two curiosities.

This postcard in the 'Idle Moments Series' from 1904 is rather odd. Silent Pool in Abinger obviously doesn't look right.

Was this a mislabelling of Abinger for Albury - or was it Abinger copying the Silent Pool name for some pond of their own?

Wood Cottage in Albury:

"This charming sketch in charcoal and ink shows the old police cottage during the 1800s. The drawing, by local artist Sage [whom I can find no trace of], was found by councillor Mr Bernard Parke in the attic of his home.

The cottage was the home of his great-grandfather, Mr Roger Parke, when he was village bobby around 1860."

This old sketch shows a horseman and a carter both proceeding on the right-hand side of the lane... Perhaps country people just didn't care for the laws from London, because driving on the left had been standardised as the rule nearly 50 years earlier, in the Highways Act of 1835.

THE END