Bourne Pool

The Heritage Trail at Bourne Brook and Pool

The locations in this leaflet are indicated by the corresponding letter on the map erected at the site

Location A ***STONE AGE FLINT BED***

In 1955 a large number of flints were picked up off the surface of the large field immediately to the west of Bourne Pool. They were scattered widely over the field right down to the Bourne Brook. There were 1816 flints in all and the collection is now in the possession of Birmingham Museum. The find by Messrs. J.T. Gould and P.W. Gathercole was reported in the Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society Vol. 74. The accompanying illustration shows some of them - varied blades, awls and scrapers, some very small. Nos. 4-6 are 'cores' from which the tools were struck. The better flints must have been traded into the area as such flints are not found locally.

They proved to be of the Mesolithic Age onwards - the period when our ancestors were changing from being hunters and gatherers to early agriculture - herding animals and growing crops. Other remains of the Mesolithic Period (12,000 - 4500 BC) have been found in the area.

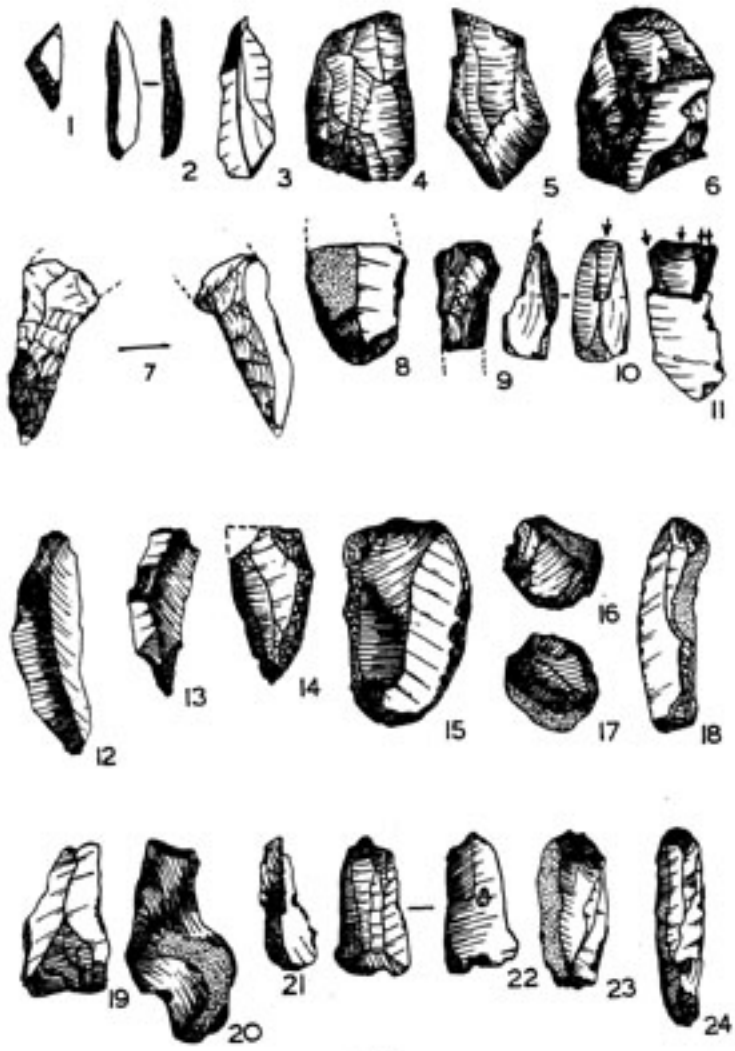


FIG. 1

Scales: Nos. 1–5 are 1; Nos. 6–24 are 1

Some of the flint implements found near Bourne Pool. Scales: 1-5 are 1:1, 6-24 are 2:3.

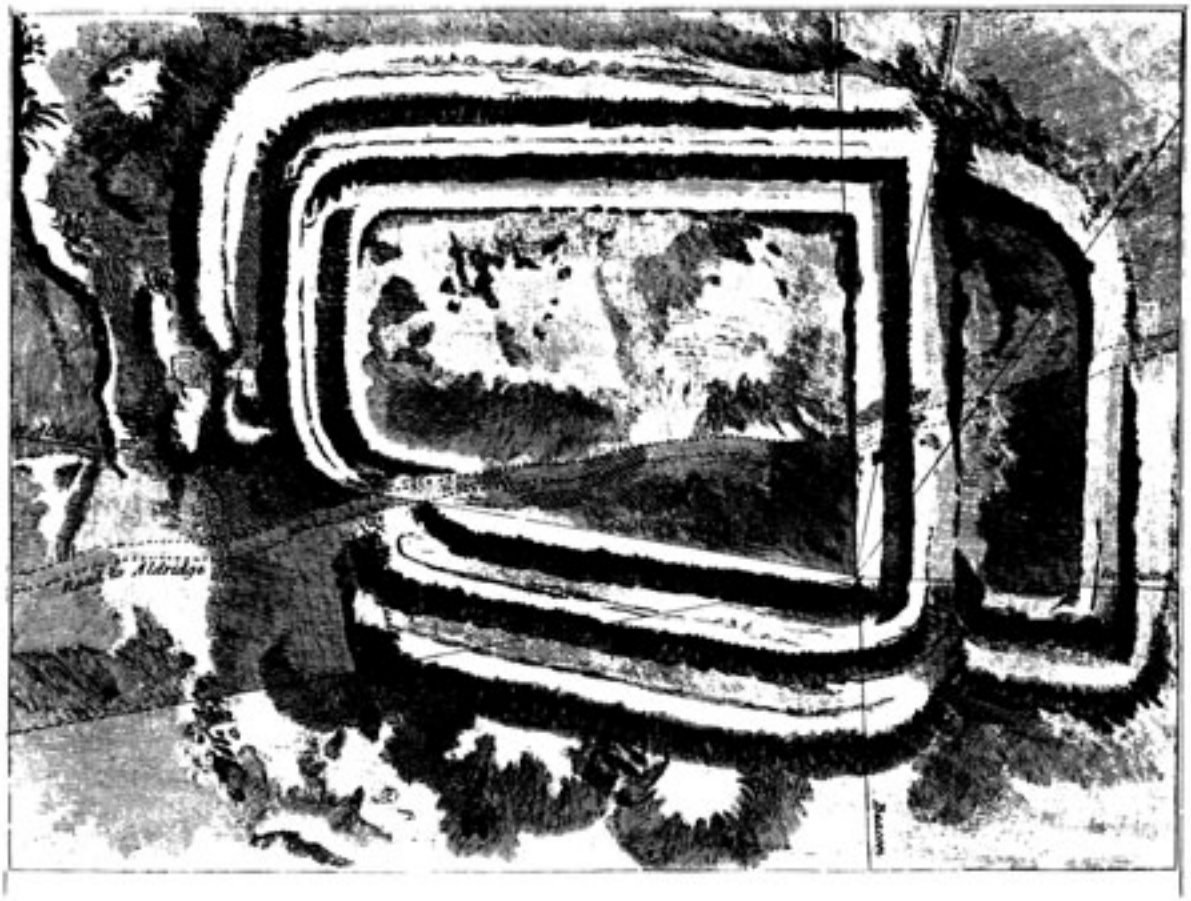
Location B LOACHES BANKS

This was the name given for centuries to a feature to the south-west of Bourne Pool. The illustration shows a plan of these banks drawn by Dr. Wilks of Willenhall in 1752 which was reproduced in Stebbing Shaw's *History of Staffordshire* (1798). The larger section (about 80m by 25m) defined by 3 banks and 2 ditches is in the field behind the hedgerow and has largely been levelled by ploughing. The small section with 2 banks and ditches - reaches into the Bourne Brook side of the hedge and has been less disturbed.

The site has been variously interpreted. In 1783 the Birmingham historian, William Hutton, called it a Saxon encampment. After excavation of parts in 1959 Jim Gould interpreted the earthwork as being associated with mediaeval charcoal burning. Later archaeologists have assigned it to an earlier prehistoric date.

In summarising the later evidence Dr. M.A. Hodder in 1990/91 interpreted Loaches Banks as an Iron Age Hill Slope Enclosure associated with animal grazing and stock control. The land around is mainly marginal land suitable only for grazing. The centuries of farming since 1800 have levelled this site so much that it is only clearly seen on aerial photographs.

PL. A.



Location C BOURNE BROOK

From Norman times onwards the Bourne brook played an important part for in the history of the locality, as it was the boundary between the Royal Forest of Cannock, which belonged to the king, and Sutton Chase, which was the hunting reserve of the Earls of Warwick.

A written deed of 1126/27 assigns the Manor of Sutton to Roger Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, - "to have, to hold the said manor of Sutton to the said Earl Roger and his heirs ... , with a free chase between the Thame and the Bourne, which divide the liberty of the said manor from others...".

The villages of Aldridge and Rushall developed separately in the cleared areas of the Royal Forest of Cannock. There were many restrictions on what the villagers could do, such as on cutting down more trees or keeping sheep.

Jim Gould in 'Men of Aldridge' relates that in 1346 the Earl of Warwick complained to the king that men were continually entering Sutton Chase and carrying away the Earl's deer. It may be that Aldridge men preferred to cross the Bourne brook and go poaching in Sutton Chase, as the severe penalties for poaching in a Royal Forest did not apply in a private 'chase'.

The dedication of the Sutton Chase side of the Bourne brook to hunting no doubt helped to preserve Loaches Banks until fairly modern times, when regular ploughing gradually reduced their height so that today they are almost completely levelled.

Location D BRAMPTHULL OPEN FIELD

Brampthull, or Brantial, Open Field, which stretched to the west of Bourne Pool, was one of Aldridge's large Open Fields. The Open Field system, started by the Anglo-Saxon invaders, was the system of agriculture common throughout the Mediaeval period across the Midlands from the Isle of Wight to the Yorkshire Wolds. They were large enclosed fields which the villagers worked on the principle of strip allotments. Each farmer had a certain number of strips to plough. Strips did not necessarily lie next to each other so each person's holding could be scattered in different parts of the field.

Each village had 2, 3 or more open fields - one had to lie fallow each year. Brampthull Field was such a field and was ploughed in this way until the eighteenth century, when the laws to enclose land came into force. No wonder the hoard of flints described in section 'A' were scattered all over the surface of the field.

The position of this field is still indicated by Branton Hill Lane. Near Brampthull Field were Aldridge's other Open Fields - to the north Drewed Field, to the south Daniel Field (Daniel Lane) and to the west Wetstone Field (indicated by Whetstone Lane).

Location E BOURNE POOL

The Bourne pool was brought into being when the Bourne brook was dammed at this point in the fifteenth century by the building of a dam approx. 1.3m high by 5m wide. The pool was not only for the provision of fish but also to provide a head of water to power a mill wheel.

The site of this dam was excavated by Jim Gould and the excavation was described in the Transactions of the South Staffs. Archaeological and Historical Society Vol. X1 (1969/70). The line of the dam is the present end of the pool. The present outlet of the pool is the old overflow from the dam.

The main outlet at the time flowed beneath the mill wheel to power it as an 'undershoot' wheel i.e. the water turned the wheel by flowing beneath it. The site of the original main outlet, the sluice gates and the mill wheel was on the north side of the dam where the garden centre buildings are.

Location F THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY IRON MILL OF SIMON MONTFORD AT BOURNE POOL

Legal documents, now in the British Museum, show that Simon Montford, Lord of the Manor at Aldridge, had an iron mill with house attached on the Brampthull or Aldridge side of the Bourne.

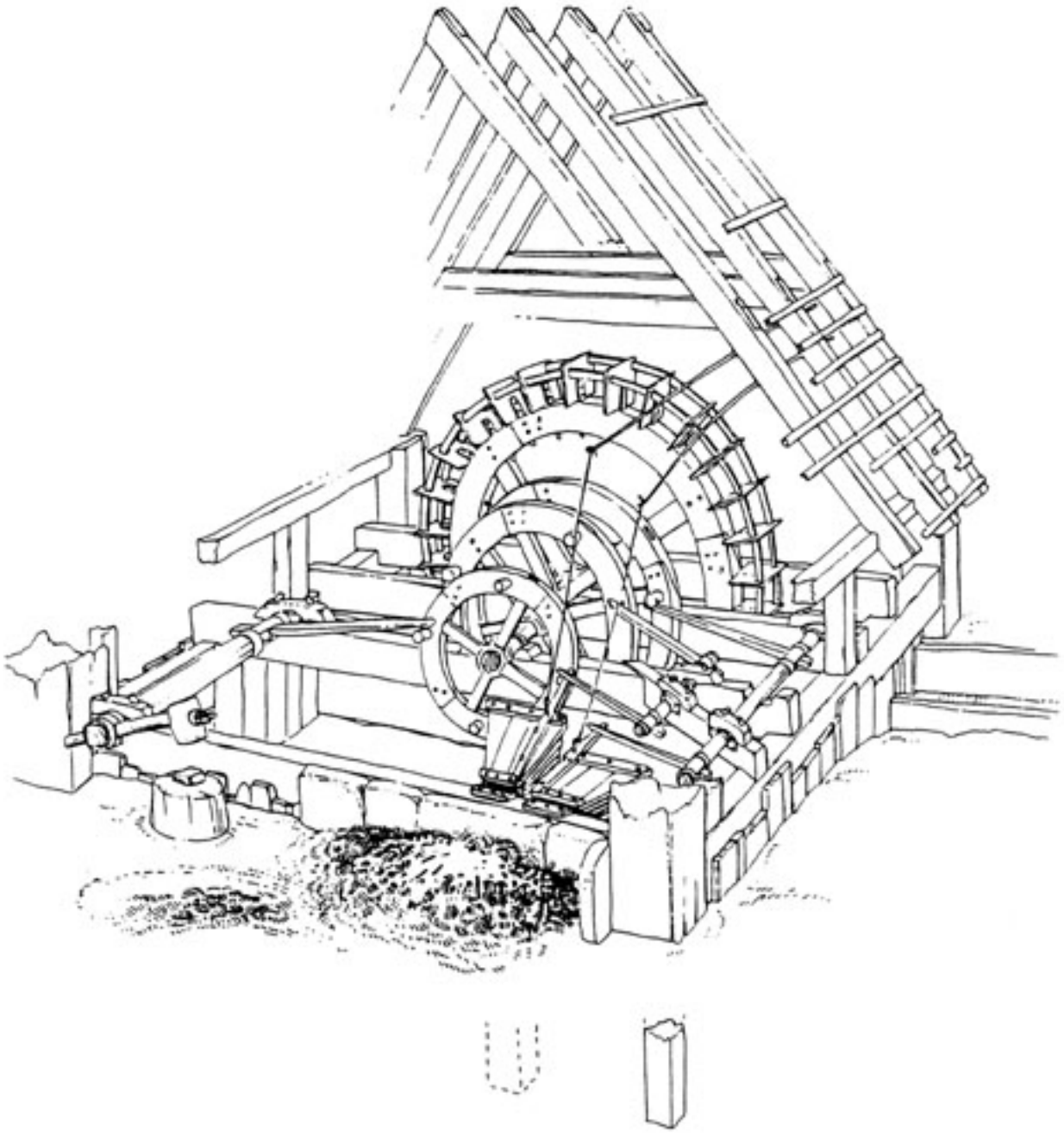
Jim Gould's excavations confirmed that the mill was on the north or Aldridge side of the dam. Analysis of the remains that he found showed that the iron produced was of high quality and that some limestone has been used in the bloomery hearth. Good iron ore was available in both Rushall and Walsall. No evidence of the house was found. The documents indicated that both mill and house were demolished in the early sixteenth century.

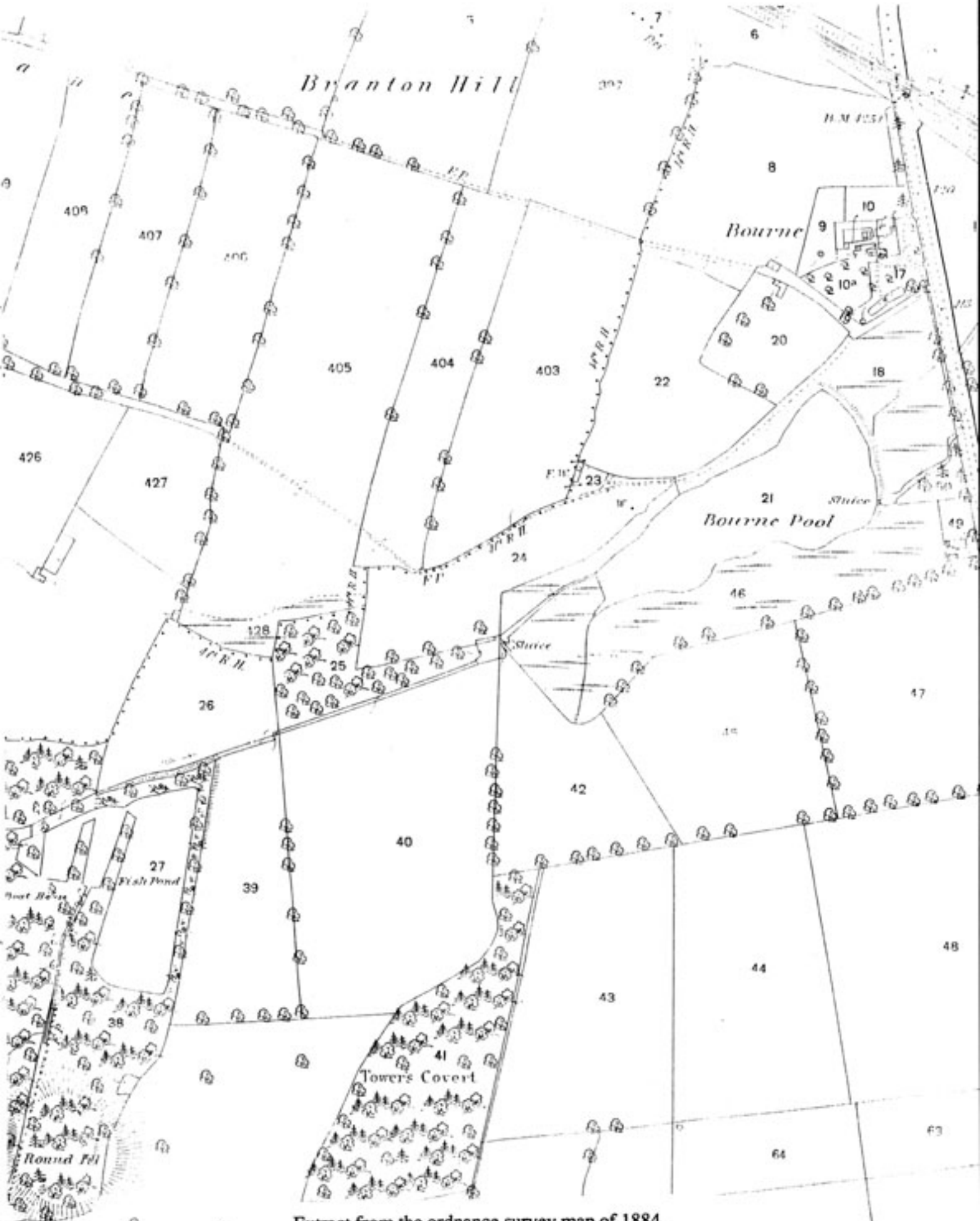
Sir Simon Montford lost his mill licence and his head when he was executed for treason in 1495 (for involvement in the Perkin Warbeck rebellion). The property was regained by his heir in 1534, but the pool was not restored until about 1586 and then presumably for fishing only. There are later documents referring to the pool, but no mention is made of a mill or iron working.

It has been difficult to find how the technology of the period would have used such water-mills in the production of iron. Jim Gould considered that the water-mill was used to operate a hammer rather than a bloomery bellows. So far we have searched in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland and the only contemporary illustration found has been reproduced here. It is from a book written in Latin and published in Germany in about 1556 entitled "De Re Metallica" written by Georgius Agricola. The 'tilt' hammers illustrated are probably more elaborate than those used at Bourne Pool. The site of all the workings are now beneath the buildings of the garden centre.

Drop hammers driven by overshot water-wheel (after Agricola, *c.* 1556)

However in 1993 the Council for British Archaeology published its report on the medieval industrial complex at Bordesley Abbey, Redditch compiled by Dr. Grenville Astill. This contained a fascinating reconstruction from the archaeological evidence by David Walsh of the medieval metal-working water-mills at the abbey site. The reconstruction shows an undershoot mill which probably used similar technology to the Bourne Pool mill.





Extract from the ordnance survey map of 1884

Location G BOURNE VALE PUMPING STATION - BRIEF HISTORY

Bourne Vale Pumping Station was constructed by Thomas Lowe and Sons of Burton on Trent in 1894/95, although the site was acquired two years earlier and a well sunk by the Company's own workforce. The borehole was sunk by E. Chapman and Son in 1894/95. The work consisted of one brick lined well 12 feet in diameter and 89 feet deep and from the bottom of this well, was constructed a thirteen and a half inch diameter borehole a further 162 feet deep, making a total depth of 251 feet.

At this station, situated at Aldridge near Walsall, the original pumping plant consisted of duplicate vertical compound rotative pumping engines and the steam for driving these engines was supplied by three Lancashire type boilers. First of the two engines was constructed by Harvey and Company of Hayle, Cornwall in 1894 and the second by Fawcett, Preston and Company of Liverpool in 1896. Total engine power was capable of moving two and a half million gallons a day, although the output from the well and borehole was limited to one and a half million gallons a day. Five cottages were erected at the site for the accommodation of the Company's employees.

The original plant was closed down in February 1935, when John Cashmore Ltd. of Tipton dismantled and removed the steam engines. It was replaced by electrically driven pumping plant supplied by Sultzer Bros. Ltd. and consists of two combined well and booster pumps, and is capable of delivering one and a half million gallons a day. Electrification and modernisation of this station was completed at a cost of £13,268

Over the years levels of nitrate in the ground water have risen to a point at which they now exceed the maximum set by the EC. A complete modernisation including the installation of the nitrate removal plant was completed in 1993 at a cost of £1.75 million.

In our efforts to bring to the notice of the community some parts of their history of which they might not have been aware we are most grateful to:

JIM GOULD M.A. FSA both for his published works and for his personal help and advice.

DR. M.A. HODDER, Planning Archaeologist for the City of Birmingham, for making available reports of his research in this area.

THE WEST MIDLANDS JOINT DATA TEAM, Solihull, whose comprehensive records helped us to see that nothing relevant was omitted.

DR. GRENVILLE ASTILL and DR. DAVID WALSH

WALSALL LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE for assistance in the layout and production of this leaflet.

This project and display were compiled for Mr. Brian Wheat by Bryan Balsom, B.A. M.A. (Ed), who would be pleased to hear via the Garden Centre management of any other 'finds' in the immediate area.