

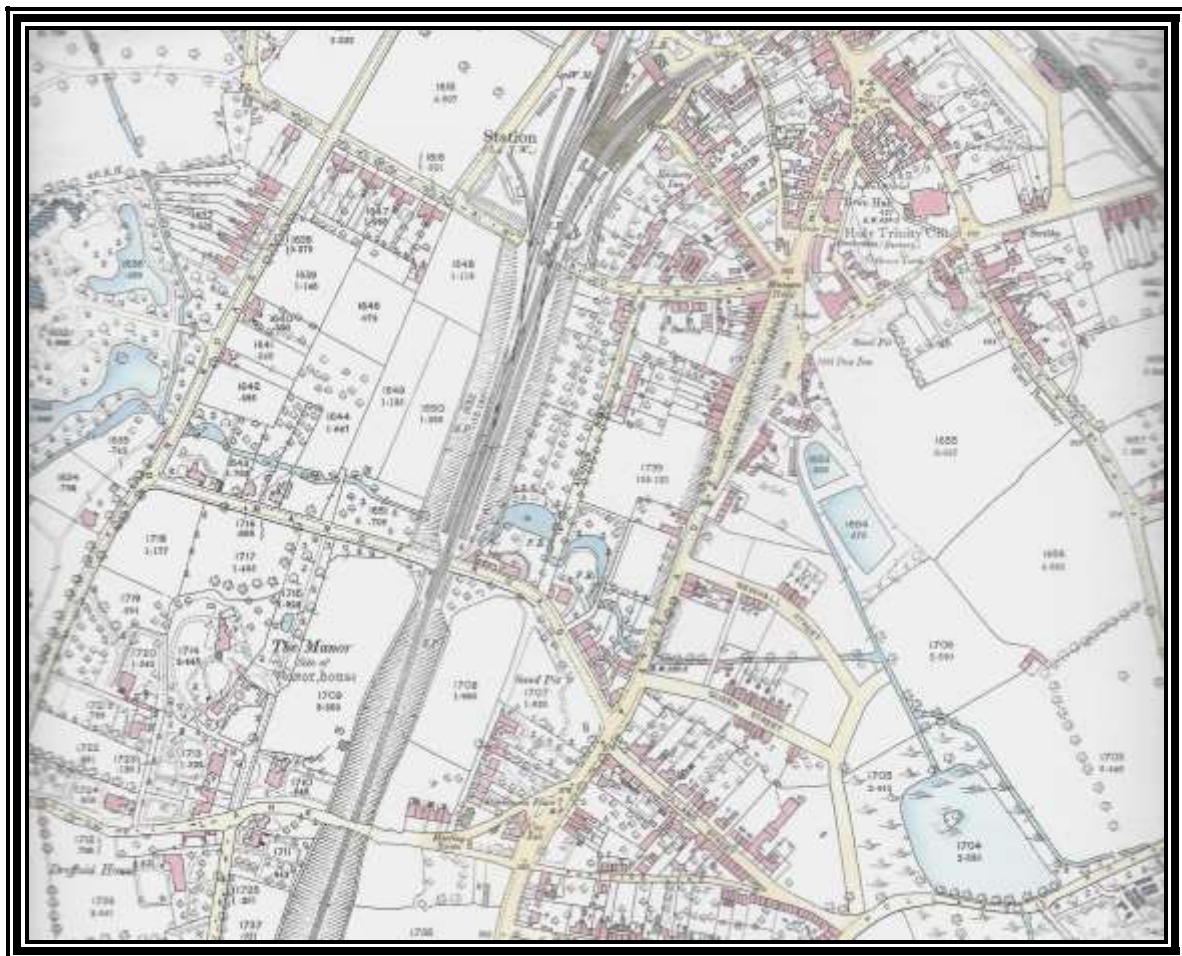
Itinerary for Town Pool etc Tour, 1994

On **Wednesday 22nd June 1994**, a balmy Summer's evening, a group of very keen local historians gathered together at Sutton Library, ready to go on a walk which could never be replicated.

Changes to the town layout east of the Parade were due to take place. As a result, **Dennis Hurley, a member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group**, was eager to show what he had discovered about the ancient pools and water courses running through the middle of the town before they disappeared under any new development.

Here you will find a copy of the Itinerary of his walk so that you, too, can put yourself in the shoes of those early members. Unfortunately, the maps reflect the poor quality of photocopying in the 1990s but here is the relevant part of a Godfrey Map for Sutton Coldfield, OS1886, which may assist.

Janet Jordan
August 2020



Itinerary for Town Pool etc. Tour.

Wednesday Evening 2nd June 1994.

Leave Sutton Library 7.45 p.m. and walk down South Parade and then West along Upper Holland Road to where it changes to Holland Road at the old Mineral Water Factory, later Concentric, now offices. (items of interest passed on the way will be dealt with in proper sequence on the return journey) (see plan 17)

The 25" OS map of 1889 shows a narrow Holland Road traversing a marshy area (District of Holland) with no houses except for Holland House, which was virtually moated. The Holland House site was incorporated in the Riland Bedford School, now renamed Plantsbrook School. (see plan 16)

The 25" OS map of 1914 shows that the buildings in Holland Road were extended from the West only as far as the marsh land opposite the site of the old mineral water factory. When houses were eventually built in the former marsh land and pools, i.e. in the lowest section of Holland Road, that part was renamed Upper Holland Road, possibly to avoid a clash in house numbers (see plan 17).

Return to the Plants Brook culvert crossing Upper Holland Road and note that the course of the brook runs straight across the site of the old Holland Pool on the north side (plan 17). The name of a mill owner lower downstream was Plant, and his name was adopted by the authorities for the entire length of the brook as a matter of convenience.

It was the contention of the late Norman Evans that the ancient name, Ebrook, as used by the old Warden and Society and the inhabitants of Sutton, should never have been allowed to be changed. However, if plan no. 18 be referred to, it could be contended that the courses of the Longmoor Brook and the Ebrook did not join to form one stream until a point south of the Holland area. There is now only one brook in the valley between Sutton Park and the above junction point, and this runs in an ancient channel which has always carried the water from the longmoor valley, - so should it not have been designated the "Longmoor Brook"?

Return to the car park and notice the line of trees (black poplars), which mark the edge of the former Holland Pool (plan 17). The largest of these trees, which is that nearest to Upper Holland Road, has a girth of 11'5", equivalent on the old rule of thumb basis to 137 years of age. On the south side of Upper Holland Road there is a line of beech trees, now in the grounds of Plantsbrook School, of which the largest has a girth of 9'6", or some 114 years old.

Follow South Parade towards the town and note that part of the pavilion in the Methodist Sports Ground was claimed by the late Ken Williams to have been a boat house originally. (This is being enquired into by a church member who was taking photographs when I was there).

Turn into the new by-pass (Lower Queen Street) and cross over to the upstream end of the Plants Brook culvert, and it will be seen that the channel of the town mill tail race has been replaced by a concrete storm drain. To the west can be seen the channel of Longmoor(?) Brook which may also have served as the overflow from the old town pool. It would appear that in its early history access to Sutton Town could only be gained with difficulty across the marshy valley, except by causeways at the Dam and at Holland.

Return to South Parade and proceed towards Lower Parade. At the last few boarded up houses on the left, turn in to the rear gardens, through which the former course of the mill tail race ran, between fences and hedges which can still be identified. (plan 17). At the boundary between the last house and the former car show-rooms (now market), is a manhole chamber built in blue brick and partly out of the ground, from the vicinity of which the mill race continued some 240 feet before turning almost due north up to the southern corner of the Dog Inn car park (now "The Knot") (plans 16 and 17).

Return to South Parade and immediately walk a short way up the spiral concrete vehicle ramp from which the manhole may be seen to be on the line of the former course of the mill race towards its junction with the former town pool overflow/ penstock discharge, which might historically best be referred to as Longmoor Brook (plan 17). From the vantage point of the vehicle ramp it may be appreciated that the mill race has long since been covered by the raised and extended embankment of the highway on top of the original dam. (plan 16 and section 19).

Return to South Parade and proceed up the slope caused by the additions to the original dam over the centuries, forming the present carriageway of Lower Parade at a higher level (section 19). At Lower Parade turn right to the Knot, and down the ramp to the rear car park, from the corner of which the mill tailrace would appear to have commenced, but at a much lower level.

Return to Lower Parade, turn left and continue to Newhall Street. Turn into Newhall Street and down the ramp, a distance of some 50 yards, from the embanked Parade level to the valley floor. Turn right into The Fordrift, which leads through to Queen Street; at the Newhall Street end some industrial premises still exist. The Fordrift crosses the stream which for many years has carried all the surface water from Sutton Park but was named by the authorities "Plants Brook".

The view downstream has been blocked by the developers, but plan 16 shows that the stream followed a straight course from the Parade to the tail race of the town mill. The later plan 17 shows that a loop was made to the stream in order to facilitate the construction of a group of houses in Newhall Street (the land so developed belonged to a councillor)

The view upstream from the Fordrift shows the stream emerging from a culvert under a building fronting on The Parade. Old sketches show the bridge which existed before the Parade was developed. The level of The Parade at this point was such that the stream on the west side could only be reached via extremely steep sloping entries between adjacent

properties, before the development shown on plan 17 was replaced by Brassington Avenue and the Gracechurch Centre. From the Foredrift the lower floors of the Parade shops, opening to the natural valley level, can be seen, with former gardens now commonly used as car parks.

Proceed through to Queen street, passing on the left a house with traces of a painted sign on its wall advertising its previous existence as a cafe, and on the right a shop with offices above, where in 1973 a fire bomb, allegedly planted by the IRA, set fire to the building while an insurance broker was in his upstairs office - his attempt to escape through the high window led to fatal injuries.

Turn right up the ramp of Queen Street and cross past the "Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield" sign to Brassington Avenue, crossing it and enter the car park beyond. This occupies part of the bed of the old town mill pool, but has been disturbed, levelled and metalled. Between the car park and the railway embankment the old bed has been but little disturbed, but is now virtually inaccessible by reason of the trees and undergrowth.

Return to Brassington Avenue, climb the footpath up to Manor Road, proceed past the railway and turn down the footpath on the right which crosses Longmoor Brook and leads onto the housing development located in the western part of the old town pool site. It is possible in parts of this area to assess the configuration of the bottom of the old town pool, i.e. an extensive almost flat centre portion with fringe areas rising to Manor Road and Park Road respectively.

Proceed to the rear of the two remaining Victorian houses nos. 25 and 27 Clifton Road and note the huge old tree at the end of the rear garden, which may be that shown on the 1889 OS map, and is clearly very old. It would also appear to be located at the lowest point on a cross-section of the valley. These two houses were built near the upstream end of the drained town pool and in the vicinity of what may well have been the original course of the E Brook on its way to form the major supply of water to the town pool; after the destructive flood of 1668, when the pool was drained, the E Brook followed this original course for a time.

There is some uncertainty as to where the E Brook crossed Clifton Road: the "Sutton Inclosure Map" of 1824 indicates that it crossed immediately to the south of the two houses; the 25" OS of 1889 indicated a crossing slightly to the north of them; and the late Norman Evans favoured a crossing further north, opposite Fawdry Close. Actually the lowest point of Clifton Road (364 ft O.D.) is slightly further north still, it may be identified by two road gulleys and two manhole covers together. The two houses were built over cellars, and the occupant of the northern one (no. 25, also older) stated that the cellar was several feet deep in water when he acquired the house.

In 1668 a disastrous flood caused the failure of Wyndley dam and in turn the failure of the town pool dam and the destruction of the town mill, which latter was never replaced. However, the damage at Wyndley was made good, and that mill remained in operation as a blade mill, a rolling mill, and finally a saw mill, and the remaining building was not

demolished until 1961. Although the course of the culvert and tail race remained virtually unaltered, the older mill (looking downstream) was on the right-hand side whereas the saw-mill was on the left-hand side of it.

Although the Longmoor Brook and the E Brook both flowed into the town pool, it appears likely that at an early stage after the failure of the town pool dam, the flow from the Longmoor Brook reverted to its original course (or was possibly channelled) along the southern edge of the drained town pool, possibly being augmented by a penstock/overflow discharge point at the southern end of the town pool dam, in order to reduce the flow passing through the vicinity of the destroyed town mill. Evidently the continued flow of the E Brook through the site of the old town pool and particularly its passage through the old dam caused problems, which were cured some time before 1824 by diverting the E Brook into the Longmoor Brook on the west side of what is now Clifton Road.

In order to prevent the diverted Ebrook from overflowing its bank and flooding across the meadow, a low earth dam known as the Green Dam (vide Norman Evans, *Scenes from Sutton's Past*.) - or was it merely landscaping? The Green Dam may be seen from the vicinity of the two houses in Clifton Road.

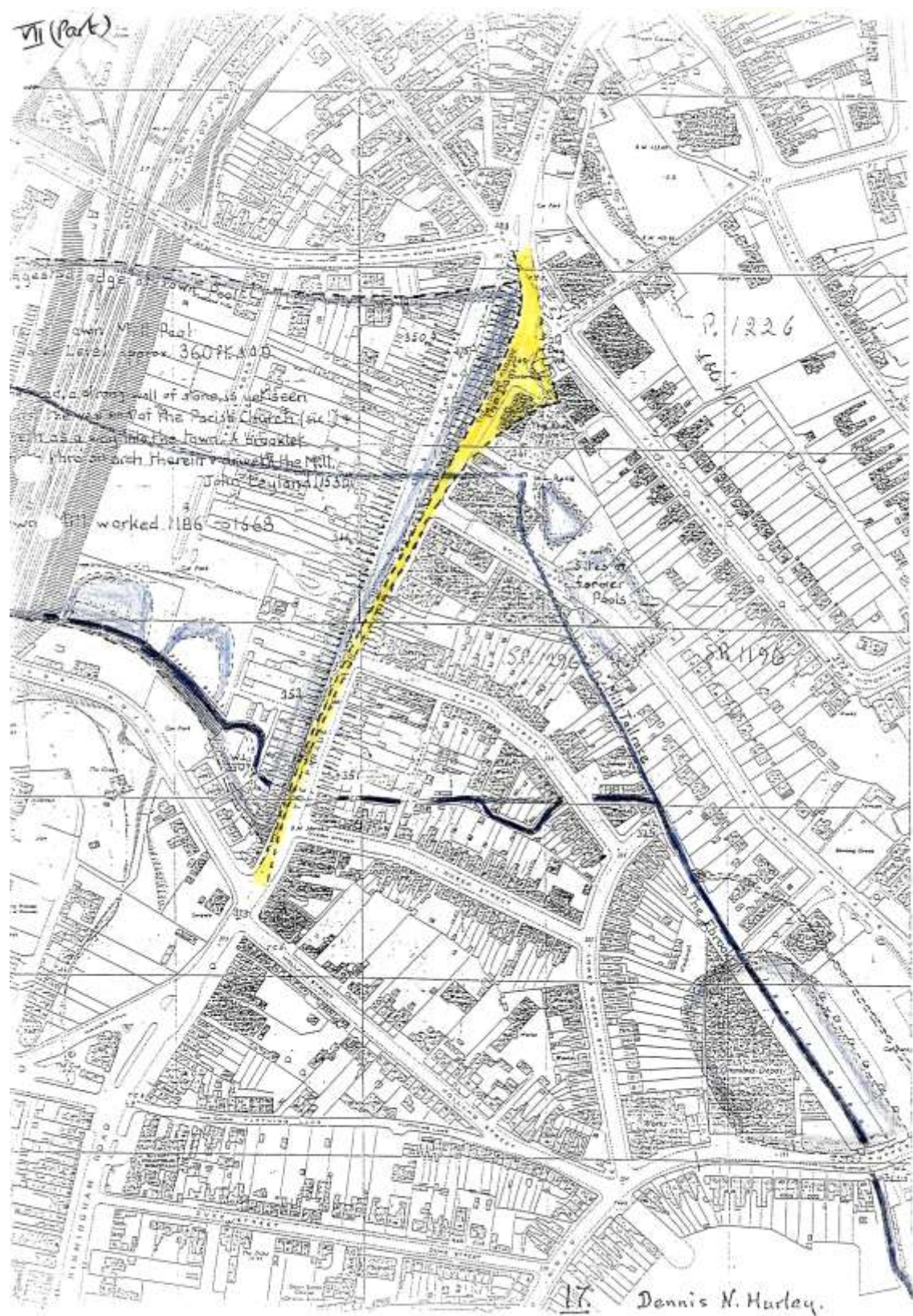
Cross Clifton Road in this vicinity and it may also be seen that the Ebrook discharges into the larger Mere Pool, as does the Longmoor Brook from Wyndley Pool. The outlet from the Mere Pool, now combining the flows of both streams, crosses Clifton Road into the channel skirting the Town Pool site. This, and the tail race from Wyndley, may have been artificially deepened to improve the head of water at Wyndley Mill, the increase in power extending its useful life by many years. If such deepening did occur, it may have contributed to a dam failure at Wyndley in the vicinity of the culvert feeding the millwheel when it was operating as a saw mill, as shown on a photograph in the collection of the late Ken Williams.

Proceed along Clifton Road and turn down Wyndley Lane to the Pool dam, and a short way along, with care, a weir at the water's edge can be seen, marking the site of the sluice gate and culvert which passed through the dam to the mills on the opposite side. It would appear that the original course of the Longmoor Brook was close to the sandstone escarpment of Manor Hill, just as the Ebrook may have been close to the sandstone escarpment below Holy Trinity Church.

In the Middle Ages the hilltop site of the Sutton Manor was protected by the marshy valley of the Longmoor Brook and the Ebrook valley (see plan 18). According to Ken Williams, the town mills were operating in 1186, but Wyndley Pool may be earlier than that, perhaps made to conserve fish; it is reputed to be the oldest pool associated with the present Park. The Deer Park boundaries investigated by Dr. Michael Hodder in the Park were thought to be 12th century, and one skirts the north-west edge of Wyndley Pool. Wyndley Pool may have been two or three feet lower if it was a fish stew, it probably predates the deer park (which would have included some pools). The construction of the boundary would have given the opportunity to raise the level of the dam, as the boundary bank would have impounded the water on the Longmoor Valley side. The ditch associated with the bank

would thus have drained away any leakage through the bank, and also could have taken a discharge from a storm control penstock similar to that in use now. - the modern storm overflow weir is built into the deer park boundary bank and discharges into the same deer park ditch.

VII (Part) :-

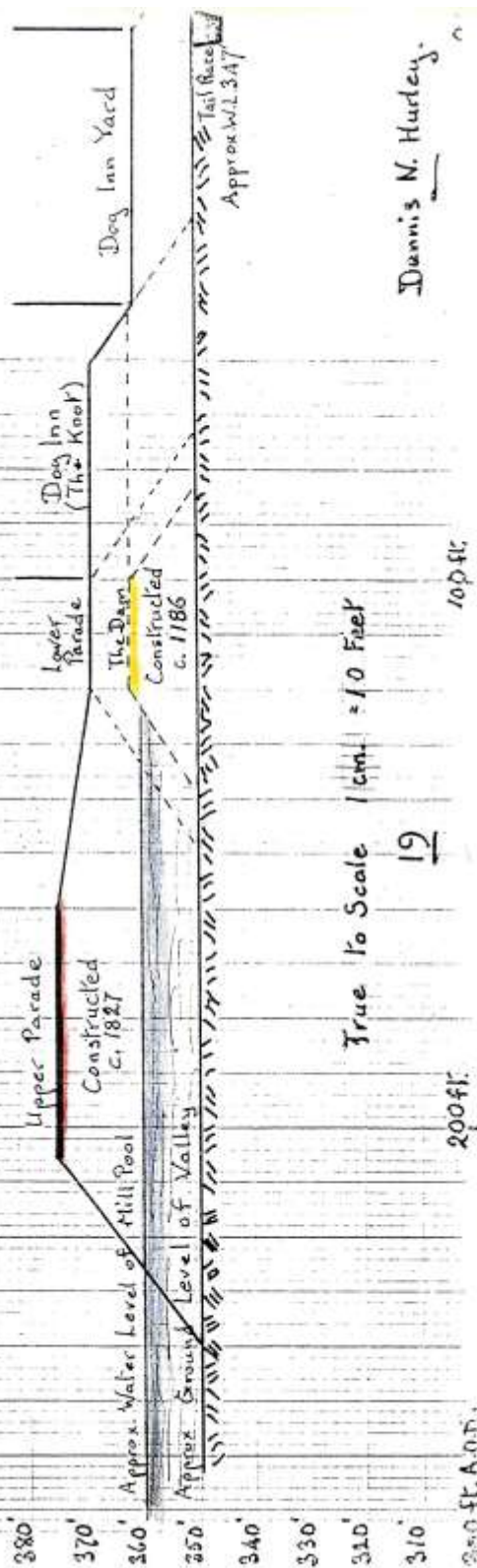


27.04.94

Sutton Coldfield Town Dam & Embankment's

Diagrammatic Cross Section

19



Dennis N. Hurley

Part of:-

Map or Plan Referred To
Sutton Coldfield Inclosure

Thomas Wedge - Commissioner (c.1825)

27.04.94

i.c.w. Town Pool, Dam & Mill

