

NOTE

THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER'S FISHPONDS AND DEER PARKS

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ABSTRACT

Some time ago, two papers of mine appeared in the Proceedings on the fishponds and deer parks belonging to the medieval bishops of Winchester (Roberts 1986 and 1988). The papers were based mainly on information derived from 13th and 14th century bishopric pipe rolls, and partly on later documents and fieldwork. Some of the points made then need to be amended and qualified in the light of subsequent research.

FISHPONDS

My paper on fishponds drew attention to the distinction between large breeding ponds and the generally smaller storage ponds, and I suggested that the word *vivarium* was used exclusively for the former and *servatorium* for the latter (Roberts 1986, 130–33). In line with recent discussion of these terms (Steane 1988 i, 39–40), I am now inclined to take a more cautious view and to believe that the pipe rolls may not always be drawing such a clear-cut distinction. For example, in 1253–54 dace and roach were sent to the bishop's house at Witney (Oxfordshire) to stock (*instaur*) the *servatorium* there (HRO Eccles II 159291B). This entry is at least consistent with the use of the *servatorium* as a breeding pond.

Medieval fishponds were frequently drained or 'broken' and, to this end, it was clearly necessary to prevent water from feeder streams entering the pond. The pipe rolls show that diversion, or bypass, channels were dug to take this water around the pond. In my paper, I argued that this was the only procedure deemed necessary for pond drainage in medieval Hampshire (Roberts 1986, 135). However, recent research has shown that in many cases it was also necessary to break a section of the dam (Currie 1991, 66–67), and this was probably the object of the extensive removal of earth and stones when Alresford Pond was

drained in 1252/53 (Roberts 1986, 133). Nevertheless, where a pond lay partly in a natural hollow, as at Frensham, breaking the dam could not be an entirely effective method of drainage (Baker and Minchin 1948, 20–21 and map).

The great size attributed to medieval bishopric ponds has appeared extraordinary to some historians, but two of the largest of these ponds (at Frensham) still exist and there is no reason to suppose that they were extended in the post-medieval period when fish from ponds ceased to be regarded as high-status food. Furthermore, where there has been archaeological excavation (as at Bishop's Waltham) it has been shown that there has been a decrease in pond-size since the Middle Ages (Lewis 1985, 113–4; *pers com* Miss E R Lewis).

Dr J Z Titow points out that there is little evidence for the size of bishopric fishponds in the pipe rolls, although the numbers of fish needed to stock ponds might be indicative (Roberts 1986, 131). I had supposed that such evidence might be gleaned from expenditure on sixty acres of corn weeded at Alresford in 1252/53 'because of the breaking of the pond', since I believed that the dried out bed of the pond was cultivated and thus needed weeding (Roberts 1986, 133). Dr Titow conclusively shows that my supposition was incorrect and that this entry simply records the hiring of labour for tasks normally done by customary service but for the need for labour on the pond. However, he confirms that the dried out bed of Bishop's Waltham Pond was sown with barley when the pond was broken in 1257/58 (*ibid*; *pers com* Dr J Z Titow). Moreover, it still seems to me that fieldwork and post-medieval documentary sources support the view that Alresford Pond once covered about sixty acres – although not the 200 acres of local legend. The pond now

covers about thirty acres and its edge is separated from the parish boundary by about thirty acres of marshy land, whereas in the mid 16th century the southern edge of the pond was on the parish boundary (*VCH Hants iii*, 305).

DEER PARKS

Dr Titow confirms my view that 'new' construction in the pipe rolls often denotes a total rebuilding, rather than completely new work. Thus, the 'new' construction of a ditch around the New Park in Bishop's Sutton in 1370/71 should be read alongside the reference to ditching around the New Park there in 1252/53 (HRO Eccles II 159379; 159291A).

He has also generously made available to me the results of his work on the evidence in the bishopric pipe rolls for the size of episcopal parks. This evidence takes the form of records of expenditure on hedging, fencing and ditching around parks, measured by the perch. He chose entries giving the highest measurements available, or entries suggesting a total rebuilding (counting hedging and ditching as complementary but adding fencing if also present, unless stated to be on the top of ditches). Since (apart from a perfect circle) the square gives the largest area in relation to the circumference, he divided the total length of hedging and ditching by four to obtain one side of a square, the square of which gave the area. This was converted into acres at the rate of 160 square perches to the acre.

In six cases out of seven, Dr Titow's calculations produce lower figures for park areas than those offered in my paper (Roberts 1988, 69 and 81–83). For example, he suggests an area of 131.4 acres for Merdon outer park in 1320/21 (HRO Eccles II 159334) and 180.6 acres for what may have been the inner park in 1367/68 (HRO Eccles II 159376). This would give a total of 312 acres for both parks, whereas I suggest approximately 800 acres. Again, he calculates an area of 170 acres for East Meon Park in 1325/26 (HRO Eccles II 159338), whereas I suggest about 500 acres.

Conclusive evidence for the extent of

bishopric parks might be obtained from archaeology, but the only excavation known to me of a bishopric park bank failed to date it securely to the Middle Ages (Hewett and Hassell 1971, 39). Thus Dr Titow's calculations are important, not least because they are based on the only contemporary evidence available to us at present. However, he readily concedes that his examples may be of partial, rather than complete, remaking of park boundaries since even in the case of 'new' constructions there is no guarantee that the totality of the park's circumference was involved. I am inclined to think that this is so, and to place greater weight on fieldwork and later documentary evidence. For example, O G S Crawford's fieldwork on the great park bank at Merdon (Crawford 1951, 109) precisely matches the boundary shown in a 16th century map (HRO photocopy 390). In the absence of any evidence for 16th century emparkment there, it seems reasonable to suppose that the park banks (which enclose about 800 acres) are indeed medieval. Elsewhere, documentary evidence is generally later, but bishopric parks were often disparked in the 16th and 17th centuries (as at East Meon) and there is no reason to suppose that these parks were enlarged before they were recorded on 19th century maps. The principal reason for post-medieval park enlargement was landscaping for a great house, as occurred at Highclere (*pers com* Ms K Bilikowski). Thus in quoting the 19th century park area of 3000 acres (Roberts 1988, 82), I wrongly implied that this might be the medieval figure. Fieldwork suggests that the medieval park may have been only some 300–500 acres in area (*pers com* Mr Saxton, Highclere Estate Office). If this is so, then my estimate of the total acreage of bishopric parks in Hampshire must be reduced to about 6000 acres (Roberts 1988, 69).

Finally, a park at Overton, called 'New Park' in 1290/91 (HRO Eccles II 159313), was omitted from my paper. The existence of a park might have been predicted from the fact that there was a minor episcopal residence there (Roberts 1990, 32). Havant Chase was also omitted from my list of bishopric chases in Hampshire (Pile 1989a, 13; Pile 1989b, 114–18).

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