



PONDHEAD

A HISTORY OF PONDHEAD INCLOSURE & ADJOINING AREA

Derek Tippetts – October 2019

INTRODUCTION

Pondhead Inclosure is situated immediately to the south east of the village of Lyndhurst and comprises 78 hectares (193 acres). It forms part of the Crown land of the New Forest and, together with adjoining properties, is steeped in history.

There is very little in the way of published information regarding this history and this publication stems from research across a variety of sources available in the public domain. As a result, most of the information contained herein is based on reliable sources including the National Archives and Hampshire Archives. Assumptions have been made in some instances, but I have attempted to keep these to a minimum. It is also impossible to view the history of Pondhead in isolation to that of the village of Lyndhurst and the New Forest in general.

There is undoubtedly more history lying beneath our feet in Pondhead, still waiting to be discovered. In particular, more research is warranted on the whereabouts of the “pond” in Pondhead and a potential hunting lodge within its boundary. This publication includes the information we have to date on these.

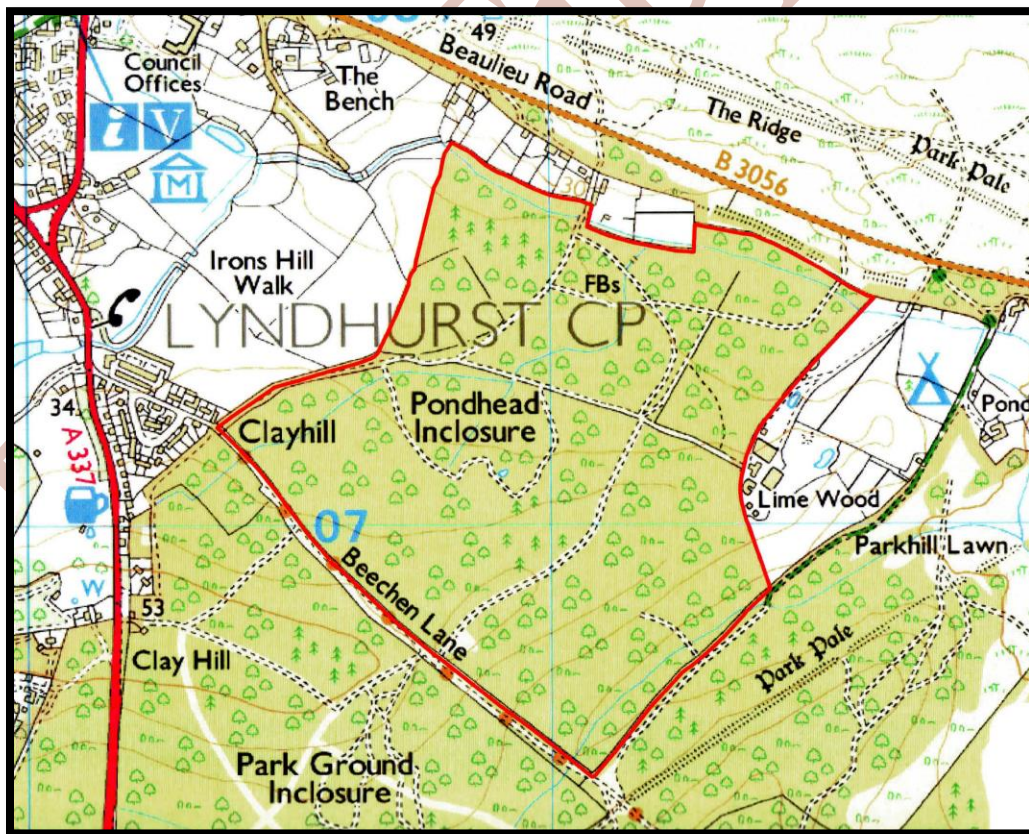


Figure 1 - Location map courtesy of Ordnance Survey

GEOLOGY

In terms of its geology, the bedrock of the area is overlain by superficial deposits of alluvium comprising clay, silt, sand and gravel. These deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary period and point to a local environment previously dominated by rivers. It is thought the Solent's waters and that of its tributaries once covered much of the New Forest.

PREHISTORIC (970,000 BC-AD 43) - ROMANO - BRITISH (AD 43-410)

Much of the area's early history is lost in the mists of time. There appears to be no evidence relating to occupation of the New Forest area before and during the Iron Age (200 BC to 550 BC). However, there is evidence to suggest that a successful industry during this period, in the New Forest, was charcoal burning and coppicing for timber.

The original Ordnance Survey map of the area indicates the discovery of Roman coins just outside its north east boundary and, interestingly, the route of the old "Salt Way" from the Lymington/Keyhaven salt marshes runs directly along the eastern boundary of the inclosure and adjoining Parkhill Lawn. The Romans would have doubtless used this salt route. The Salt Way was used from pre-Roman times for many centuries and is the track along which salt produced in the salt marshes was transported to Southampton and Winchester. For lengthy periods of history, salt was a very valuable commodity.

SAXON (AD 410-1066) - MEDIEVAL (AD 1066-1500)

There is evidence of a prolonged Saxon presence in the New Forest and, in particular, the village of Lyndhurst's name is of Saxon in origin, meaning "lime wood". Within Pondhead, local archaeologists have confirmed that some of the internal compartmental boundary banks date back to Saxon times. During the Saxon period (and later) woodland was enclosed by systems of earthen banks which were used to define not only the type or rotation of species of tree or crop being grown but also to define ownership. They date back to the Saxon charters, which documents typically made a grant of land. During the Saxon period the New Forest area was known as Ytene, meaning land of the Jutes. The Jutes were of Germanic origin who, with the Angles and Saxons, invaded southern England in the 5th century AD. This area became the Saxon kingdom of Wessex with nearby Winchester, its principal

city where Saxon Kings would have stayed on a regular basis. Against this background it is perhaps safe to assume that Saxon Kings hunted here.

The Saxon period witnessed many Viking raids and as a consequence, England had four Viking kings between 1013 and 1042. The greatest of these was King Cnut (1016 – 1035), who was king of Denmark as well as of England. It is recorded that Cnut was proclaimed King in nearby Southampton where he had a base. During his reign, he was the first to attempt to impose “forest laws” on the New Forest so we can safely assume that he also hunted in the area.



Figure 2 - William the Conqueror

Following the Norman conquest of 1066, it is well documented that William the Conqueror created the New Forest (Nova Foresta) in 1079. At the time of his Great Survey of 1086 (Domesday Book), the village of Lyndhurst, its manor and its surrounding lands were recorded as being owned by a family who derived their name from the land – Herbert Lyndhurst (also referred to as Herbert the Forester). Overall however, the manor belonged to the King. There is documentary evidence showing that the village and its environs had been already established and developed as a place of some import prior to 1066.

The Manor of Lyndhurst was large, encompassing over 600 acres of land and was located within the historic core of the village of Lyndhurst. The area that we now know as Pondhead Inclosure has always been at the New Forest’s heart and records indicate that the land around the Manor of Lyndhurst was used as hunting ground from at least 1086 and probably prior to this. Officially, Lyndhurst Deer Park (also referred to as the King’s Park) was enclosed in 1291 by King Edward 1, and it surrounded Pondhead Inclosure. It was a royal deer park within a royal hunting forest. Clues to the area it covered can still be found in the names of the adjoining areas of woodland – Park Hill and Park Grounds. It was enclosed by the Park Pale. The term “pale”, is old English for a fence and this would have been constructed on top of an earth bank with an internal ditch which prevented deer from escaping once driven in there.

In 1270, King Henry III had granted the Manor of Lyndhurst and wardenship of the New Forest to his Spanish daughter in law, Eleanor of Castile, the wife of Prince



Figure 3 - Eleanor of Castile

Edward who subsequently became King Edward I upon the death of his father. During his reign the first record of a royal manor house in Lyndhurst is found. It occupied the site of the current Queen's House, a mere stone's throw from Pondhead and the adjacent deer park. In those days the Royal Court travelled around the country and it is known that Edward and Eleanor made frequent visits to the manor house from documents of State that were signed by King Edward at Lyndhurst. Unlike many royal marriages of convenience, Edward and Eleanor were a devoted couple who both enjoyed hunting and it is safe to assume that they did so in and around Pondhead. Queen Eleanor died in 1290, aged 46, and during her marriage to Edward gave birth to 15 children. Today, the many walkers

who pass through the inclosure are unaware that they are walking in the footsteps of Edward and Eleanor.

After the death of Eleanor, three subsequent Queens of England held the manor of Lyndhurst until 1333 – Margaret of France (second wife of Edward I), Isobel of France (wife of Edward II) and Phillipa of Hainault (wife of Edward III). During this period the Lyndhurst Manor became known as the Queen's House. Perhaps it is also safe to assume that all three Queens and their husbands visited Pondhead, although perhaps not as frequently as Edward I and Eleanor.

When Edward enclosed the deer park in 1291 it is thought to have covered an area that eventually extended to 500 acres. Significant sections of the original Park Pale bank are still visible, and a small section of it enters Pondhead in the north-west corner. It is believed that four hunting lodges were built in the Forest from 1358, the first of these was built for King Edward III. Records show that 'John de Beauchamp was charged to sell sufficient timber from the park of Lyndhurst to defray the expense of making four lodges and ridings in the forest' (www.british-history.ac.uk). The exact location for any of the hunting lodges in Lyndhurst deer park are still

unknown, however it is thought that the existing Limewood Hotel may have been constructed upon the site of a medieval hunting lodge.

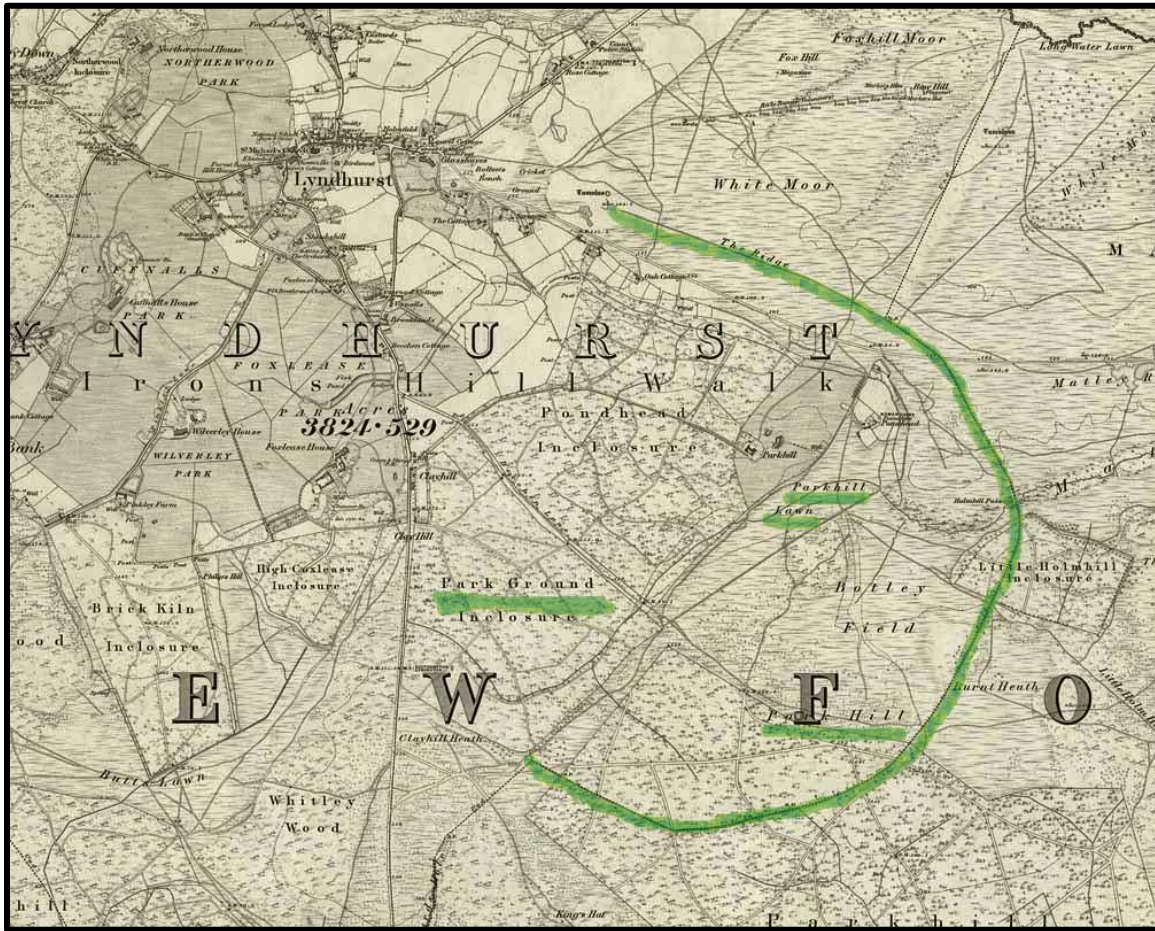


Figure 4 - 1869 OS Map showing outline of remaining Parc Pale bank in green

There is also the intriguing possibility that a medieval hunting lodge may have been located within Pondhead Inclosure. In 2009 a LIDAR (Light Detection & Ranging) survey of the New Forest was undertaken on behalf of the National Park Authority. LIDAR is basically an aerial survey that uses laser beams to penetrate tree cover and disclose what lies immediately under the soil. Lidar's ability to 'see through' vegetation is one of its main strengths and is a great aid for archaeologists as it highlights potential sites of interest. Looking at the LIDAR image of Pondhead, it highlights several interesting features. According to a survey undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in 2019 to accompany a planning application for the Limewood Hotel, there is an unusual linear feature highlighted close to the inclosure's western boundary, as seen on the image below by the arrow.

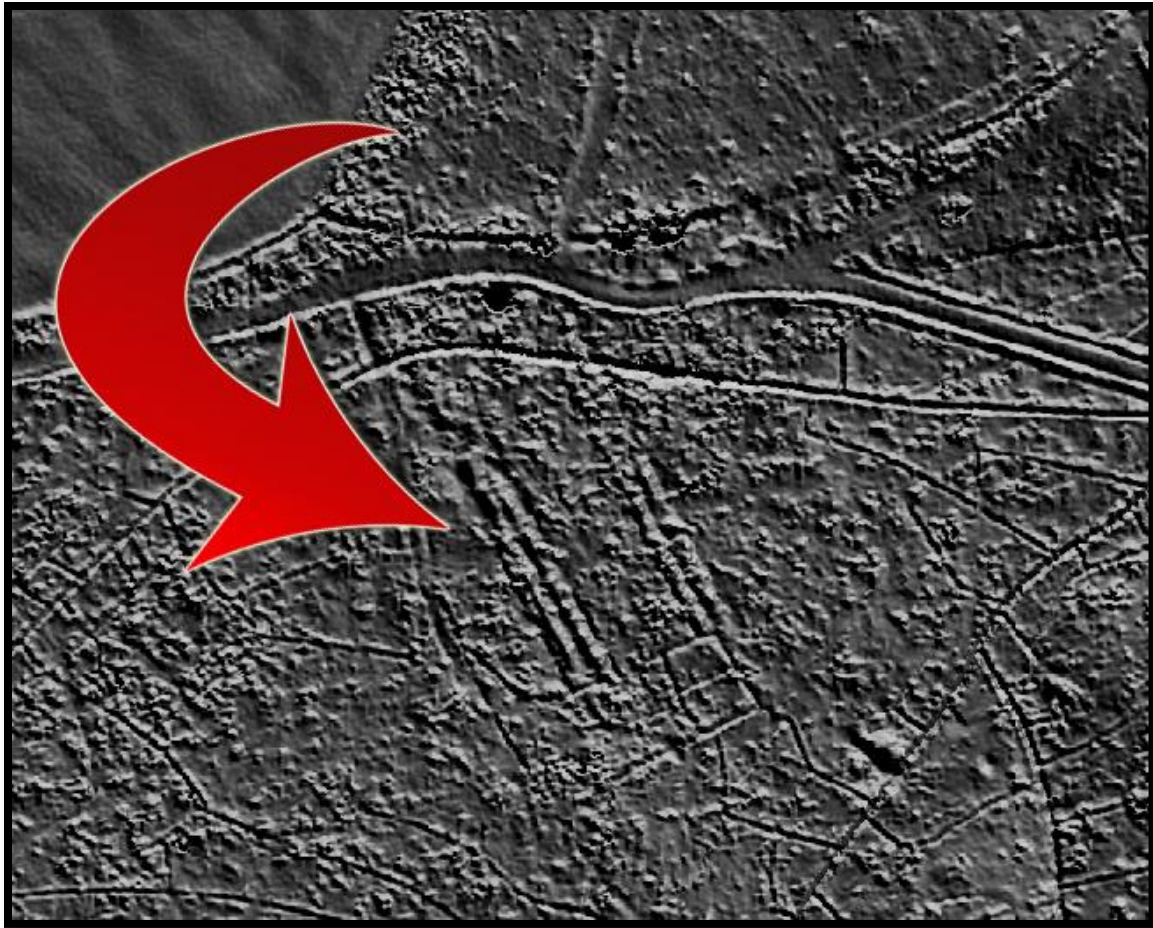
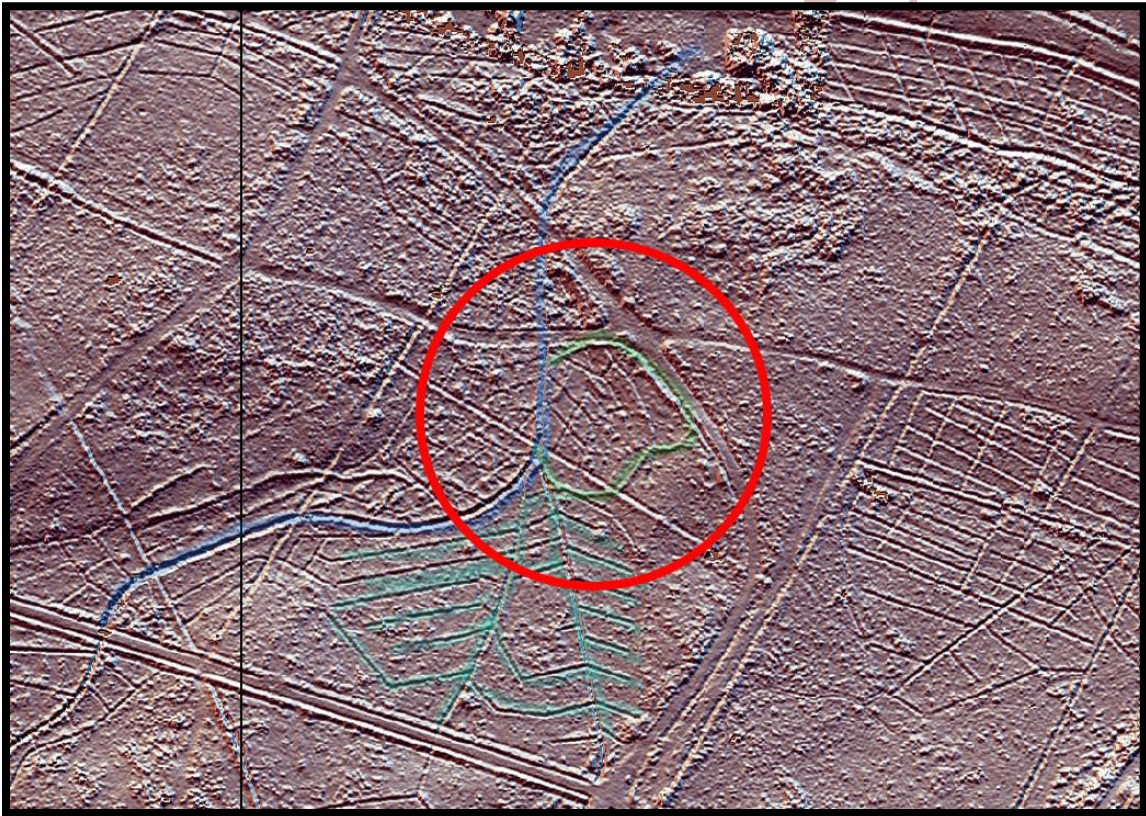


Figure 5 - Section of LIDAR image of Pondhead Inclosure

According to their survey, “the southern extent of this anomaly is formed irrefutably by a grid pattern of building platforms, comprising either a single double fronted structure or two individual buildings. Two narrow linear platforms extend at right angles from the building platform in a northwesterly direction. These elements of the site are unusual as they appear to have internal dividing compartments or inset large alcoves. One possibility is that this is a small house or lodge with an enclosed courtyard or walled garden. In terms of its date, a certain chronology may be established in that the feature appears to be superimposed by one of the tree planting ridges of the 19th century. This would discount the possibility that it was a secret military base from the World War period and would add credence to it being possibly one of the four former hunting lodges, the locations of which are as yet unknown. There is currently no evidence to ascertain the character or date of this anomaly without further targeted archaeological investigation.”

What is the relevance of the name Pondhead to a royal deer park? Well, in the reign of King Richard II, the Calendar of Patent Rolls (court records) dated between 1387

and 1390 contains various references to the “great pond” and “great stank” in the King’s Park, Lyndhurst. In those times, a “stank” was a man-made pond in which the water was retained by dams or heads and their purpose was to hold fish, destined to be served at a feast – something entirely in keeping with a royal deer park. The word “stank” actually derives from the Old French word “estanc”, present-day French “étang”, meaning pond or lake. The records also refer to the repair of the pond heads in the park. By 1428, the Rolls refer to a hunting visit by King Henry VI to the park of Lyndhurst and comments that “the pond is full of grass and mud and the head thereof so broken down that the water runs away”. In the light of these comments, it appears probable that the pond gradually silted up and disappeared after this time. Interestingly, one of the names of the old field system that existed in Pondhead in the 1700s is Pond Close and it is here that, following research, we believe the pond was sited.



The LIDAR mapping of the area shows an oval shape (coloured green) with a stream (coloured blue) running along its boundary. This site was overplanted with trees in the early 1800s and no trace of a pond remains today. However, further research is currently ongoing in conjunction with the National Park Authority.

The Manor of Lyndhurst regularly passed between the Crown and members of the aristocracy who were granted tenancies by the monarch. The granting of such tenancies was generally as a reward for loyalty and/or the prominent part played in battles, of which many were fought during this period. From around 1375, it was held by close relatives of the monarch until 1447 when it reverted to Henry VI who held it until his death in 1461. Throughout this period, Pondhead, at the centre of the royal deer park, would have entertained a series of monarchs of the realm.

POST_MEDIEVAL (AD 1500–1800) - 19th CENTURY (AD 1800–1900)

In 1581 until 1600, the manor reverted to the Crown again in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, but it is not known whether she visited the area or hunted in the adjoining deer park. However, history records that she was a keen and skilled horsewoman who loved to hunt. However, by now the New Forest had fallen from prominence as a royal hunting ground and the importance of the deer park waned. It became known as “Old Park” when a new park was created, a few miles down the road near Brockenhurst (first noted in 1484) We now know it as “New Park”. It continued in use and was extended in 1670 by King Charles II ‘for the preservation of our red deer, newly come out of France’. At this point, the importance of hunting was giving way to timber production to build ships for England’s rapidly expanding Royal Navy and hunting by royalty in the area would eventually be confined to history - the last monarch known to have hunted in the New Forest was James II in the late 1600s. By the end of the 17th century, the New Forest was in a poor state with its system of management all but collapsed and inhabited by smugglers and undesirables. The process of enclosing open land for timber production in the New Forest (subsequently referred to as “Inclosures”) began around this time and became formalised by various New Forest Acts of Parliament, commencing in 1698. This effectively heralded the transition of the New Forest from a medieval hunting forest into an area of managed forestry inclosures.

With Pondhead no longer required as a royal deer park, part of it eventually became farmland. The first evidence of this is found in 1630, when a lease relating to a dwelling at Pondhead was granted by the Lord Warden of the New Forest to George Norton, a “gentleman”. In 1665, according to the will of Arthur Buckle of Pondhead, Lyndhurst, Hampshire, there was a small but substantial range of farm buildings together with a dwelling. Little is known of Buckle although in an historical reference work of 1805, he is listed as a “free tenant”. Free tenants were characterised by the low rents they paid to their manorial lord as well as being subject to fewer laws and ties than other manorial tenants. In other words, they were a few steps up the social ladder of the time.

We start to obtain details of a chain of tenure from 1770, when Sir Philip Jennings Clarke acquired Pondhead together with an adjoining large residence known as Cox Leaze. Sir Philip was a Member of Parliament for Totnes between 1768 and 1788 and is reported to have converted Cox Leaze into a “grand two storey mansion”. Throughout this and other tenures that followed, the freehold of these various properties and land remained with the Crown. In 1781, Mr. J. Wickens rented the farm land at Pondhead from Sir Philip for a term of 21 years and editions of Encyclopedia Britannica and the Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, both published in 1793, have references to an article by Mr. Wickens of “Pondhead Lodge” (also known as Pond Head Farm), Lyndhurst, in which he described a simplified drill-plough he had invented. Other publications of the period contain articles by him providing advice on farming methods, including the benefits of manure on potato crops. From this it is perhaps safe to assume that the land which now forms the northern half of the current inclosure was originally farmed for arable crops for over a century.

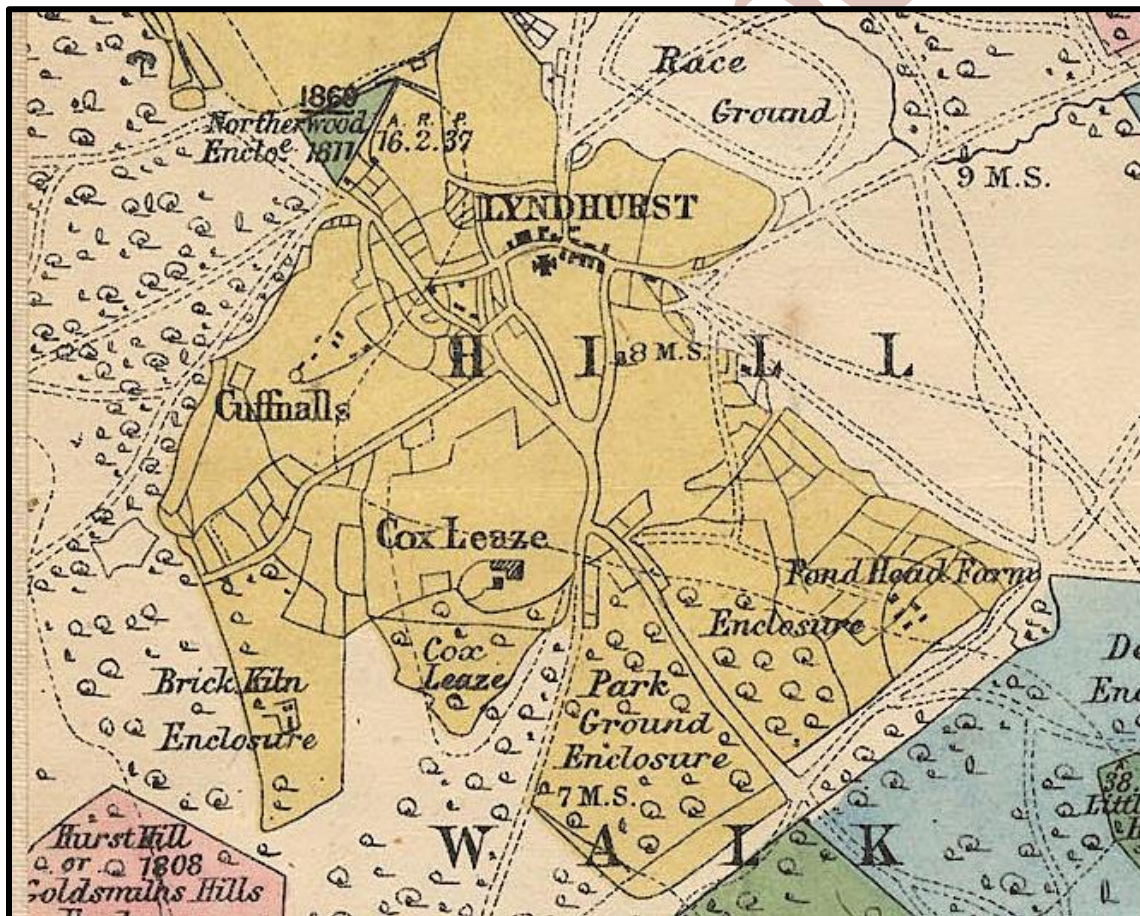
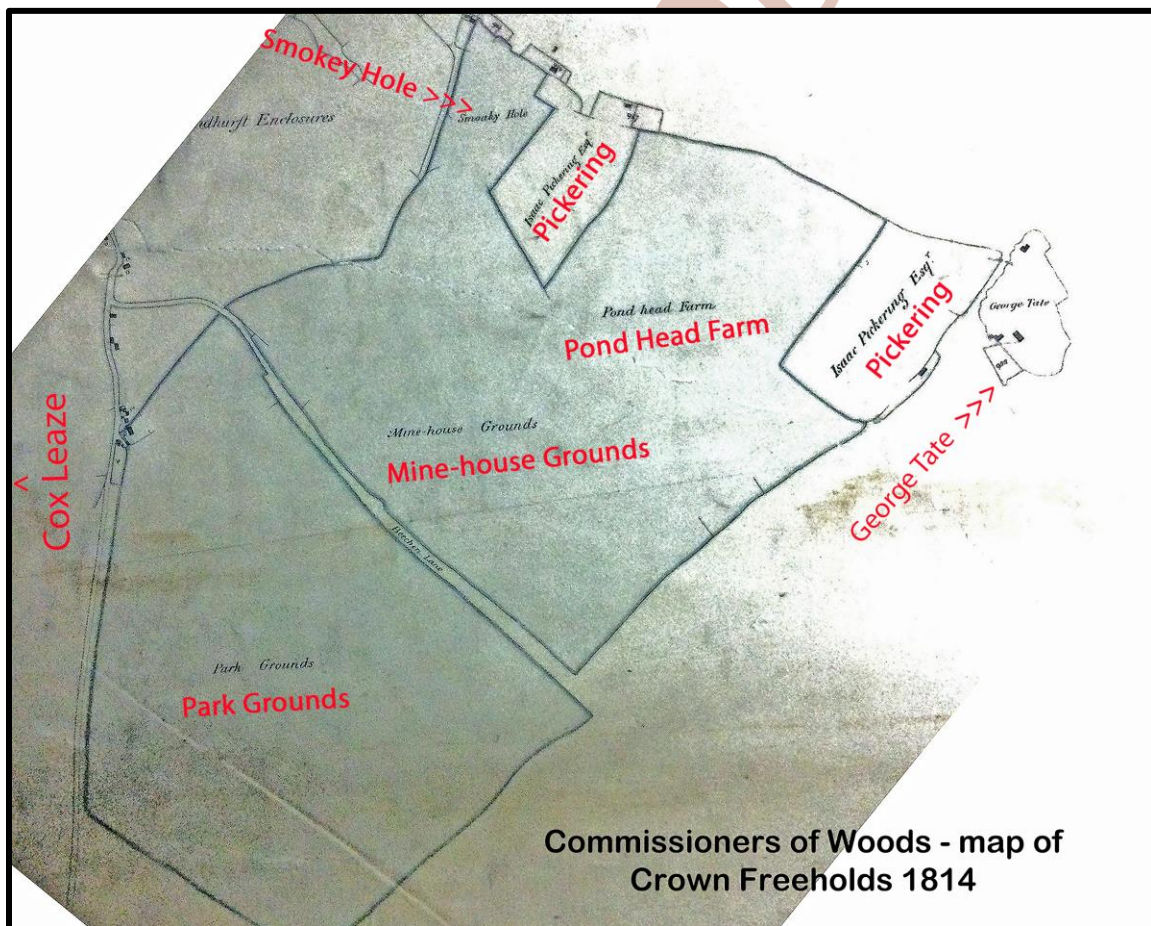


Figure 6 - Driver's Map 1789

The first detailed map of the New Forest was produced by Thomas Richardson, William King, and Abraham and William Driver and has subsequently been referred

to as Driver's Map (*Figure 6 – previous page*). This map shows that a significant area of the present inclosure comprised of a field system with a property known as Pond Head Farm. This map formed part of a Report of Commissioners of Forests of the Crown in 1789, which refers to part of the remnants of the old Lyndhurst deer park being leased from the Crown. The lease included a house at “Cox Leaze”, and the adjoining Pond Head Farm. Also included in the lease were the woodland areas of Park Grounds and Mine Houfe Grounds although the timber therein remained the property of the Crown. There is also reference to the lease in a publication of 1805 by Brayley and Britton which mentions that the only remaining estate leased from the Crown in the New Forest is Cox Leaze with Pond Head Farm together with woods. **NB** Cox Leaze was later renamed Foxlease and the current house known as Coxlease (High Coxlease) was not built until 1901.

Following Sir Philip Jennings Clarkes' death in 1788, this estate was acquired by Isaac Pickering in 1791 and subsequently, different parcels of land within and around Pondhead changed hands between various parties.



It can be seen from the Commissioner of Woods map on the previous page that the northern sector of the current inclosure was referred to as “Pond Head Farm” with two segments therein marked “Isaac Pickering”. The top segment of which is almost identical to the area we refer to as “Rosie Close” and the lower segment is now occupied by the Limewood complex.

On the map’s eastern edge is a property shown to be in the ownership of George Tate. This is on the site of the current Pondhead Farm, although the present building of that name is of much more recent construction. Records show that by a conveyance dated 1780, Eleanor Thorne (widow) of Lyndhurst sold a cottage, garden and orchard at Pondhead, and a parcel of meadow ground, to George Tate of Lyndhurst who was described as a yeoman (farmer). Interestingly, we know that in the old field system that made up the Pond Head Farm area is a field that was called Thorns Mead - mead being Old English for a meadow.

While records are sparse, it appears that there was a modest farm building on the Tate land with a larger property, known as Pond Head Lodge, constructed on the Limewood site, possibly by Isaac Pickering. Pickering was a slave owner and trader, with sugar plantations in Tortola (British Virgin Islands). There are records of a slaves’ revolt on one of his plantations in 1790 after which the ringleaders were executed. Apparently, this was the first of several such revolts. In other publications, reference is made to Pickering being instrumental in the illicit shipment of several hundred slaves from Tortola to Trinidad in the 1820s, after the Slave trade had been abolished in 1807.

A second revised edition of Driver’s Map (*Figure 7 – next page*) was published in 1814 which, again, shows the old field system relating to Pond Head Farm and shows the boundary of the current inclosure (outlined in pink). The letter “L” signifies that the fields were leased from the Crown. The site of the current Limewood complex is where Pond Head Lodge stood. The area of land marked “B” relates to George Tate’s original property and, interestingly, the individual fields within the holding contain the letter “i”. This indicates that the area was originally an incroachment (encroachment) upon Crown land. The Royal Commission of 1789 also pointed out the parlous state of the Forest with much exploitation of resources taking place including numerous encroachments of Crown land.

Another feature on Drivers’ Map is the wooded area in the south west of the inclosure referred to as Mine Houfe Grounds, which comprised of an ancient beech wood which is likely to have changed little since that time. The origin of the name “Mine Houfe (House)”, is the subject of speculation. It is known that an application was made to the Council of State of Oliver Cromwell in 1652 for a license to

undertake coal exploration in the New Forest although there is no record of the precise location proposed.

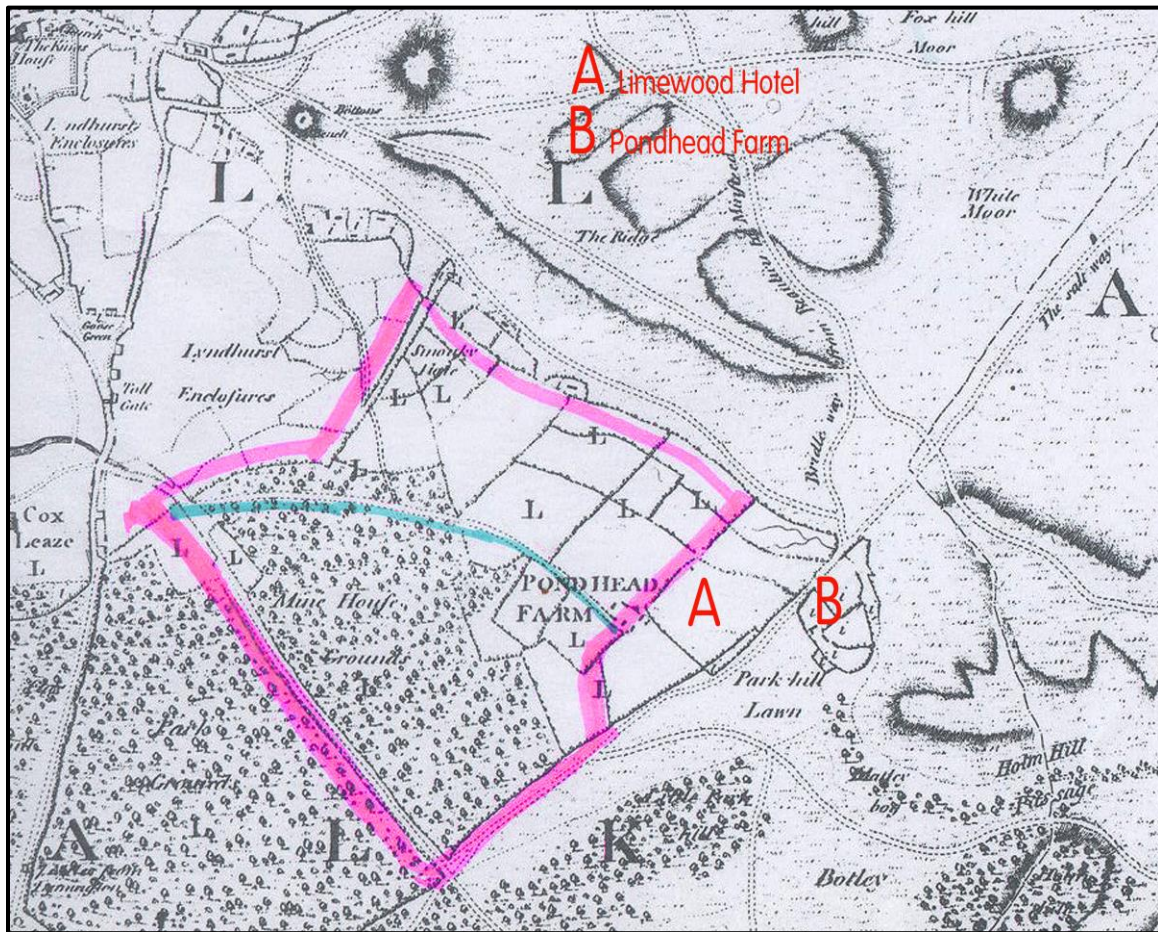


Figure 7 - Driver's Map - revised edition 1814

In their 2003 book, “Lyndhurst – a Brief History”, the authors (Babey & Roberts) comment that “coal mining, or perhaps prospecting took place in the 17th century on the outskirts of Lyndhurst - close to Beechen Lane where the road leaves the village there is an area once known as “Minehouse Grounds”, now part of Pondhead Inclosure”. Some other local historians disagree that this was the site but, intriguingly, there are remains of several long and deep parallel scrapes remaining in this area of the inclosure, the like of which have not been found elsewhere in the Forest!

Around this time concern was being expressed at dwindling timber resources for the British Navy and new plantations of timber were required as a matter of urgency. In the early part of the 19th century, the British Navy was the largest in the world with over 900 vessels of varying types and was heavily involved in the Napoleonic Wars. Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar in 1805 was still fresh in everyone’s minds and at the

end of these wars in 1815, Britain's forest cover was at an all-time low, so new plantations were deemed a priority to restore this cover and timber supply.

In 1819, there was a Report to Parliament by the Commissioners of His Majesty's Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues regarding the application of all suitable lands belonging to the Crown, for the formation of Plantations for Navy Timber in view of the country's depleted resources. Two estates in England were identified, one of which was the Cox Leaze/Pondhead estate. The Report stated that, "an Estate in the New Forest, called Cox Leaze and Pond Head Farm. has been reserved for Plantations of Navy Timber and when the present Lease of Cox Leaze and Pond Head Farm shall expire in 1821, about 494 acres which are now comprised in the



Figure 8 - Main drive from Pond head Lodge as it looks 2019

existing Lease of that Property, will be appropriated to the same purpose". As a consequence, at various times in the early 19th century, the leaseholds of the land shown on Drivers Map (*Figure 7 - outlined in pink*) reverted back to the Crown, in line with the Report, to form what is the current Pondhead Inclosure and a plantation of oaks was established on the old farm field network for

naval timber. During this period of transition to timber plantation, the main drive to Pond Head Lodge continued to run through the inclosure following the current track that runs from the pedestrian gate at the rear of the Limewood complex to the Beechen Lane gate.

Once planted, the oaks would doubtless have been tended by a team of foresters and forest labourers using only hand tools and horses for any timber extraction. During the Victorian period, they would have also maintained an effective drainage system of which many examples can be seen on the LIDAR mapping. Several features from this period have survived in Pondhead in the form of brick-built culverts of which are rare as few, if any, remain elsewhere in the Forest. The mapping also reveals an extensive herringbone drainage system around the Pond Close area where

it is believed the original Great Stank pond was located. This is clearly visible on the map on page 7 and many of its gulleys remain.

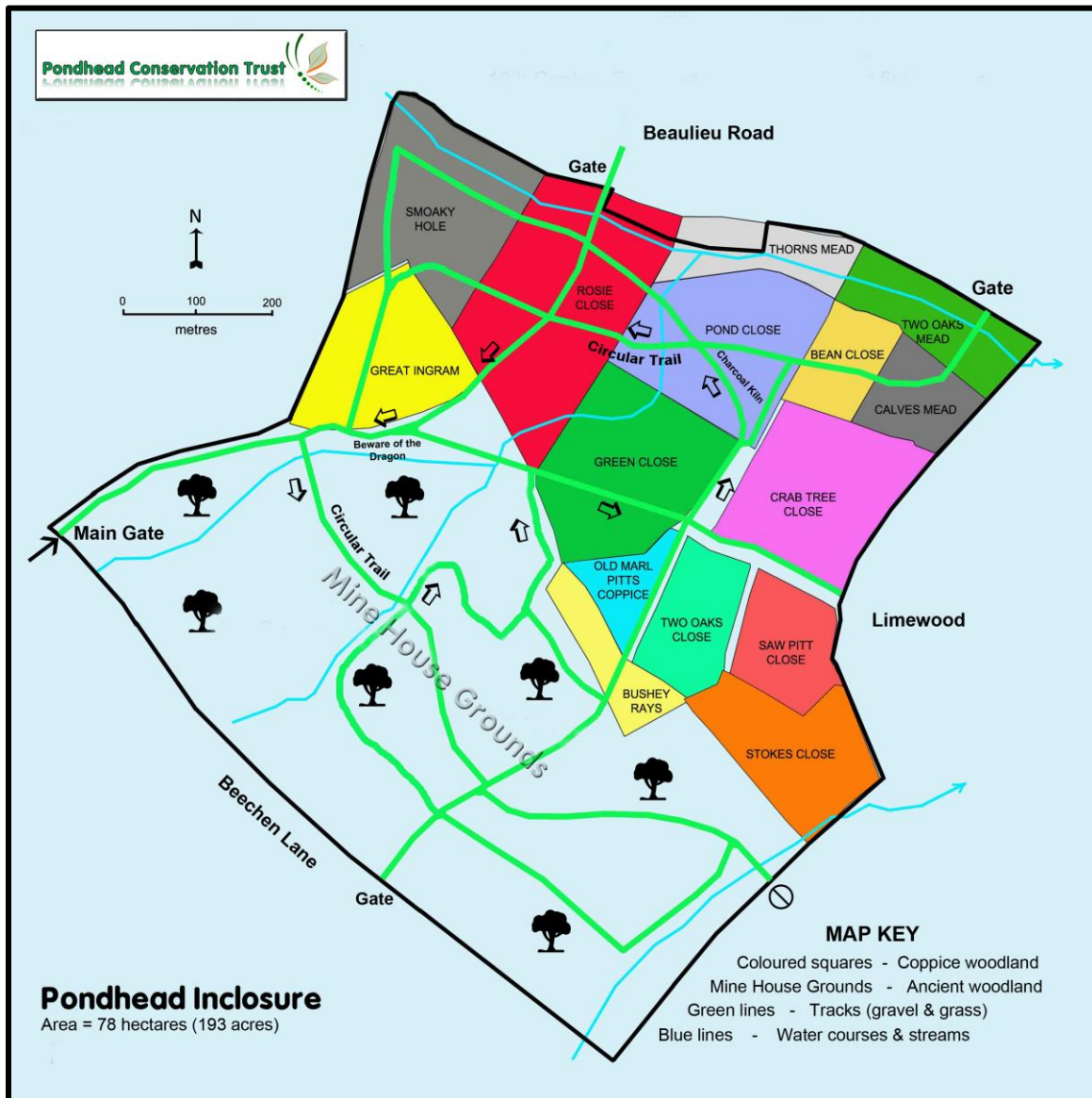


Figure 9 - Outline map produced by Pondhead Conservation Trust 2017 showing the old field network together with names.

After Isaac Pickering died in 1827, Cox Leaze (later renamed Foxlease) was sold. Subsequently in 1833, Pickering’s widow sold the Pondhead part of the leasehold estate which by then, was referred to as Parkhill Lodge. The purchaser was Charles Sturgeon, a barrister in Chancery Lane, London. In the sale’s conveyance deed, there is reference to “a mansion house with gardens, pleasure grounds, lands and buildings (35 acres)”. This document also stated that, “the property was formerly described as Pond Head Lodge estate comprising a dwelling house and farmhouse

with outbuildings, stables, yards, gardens and orchard, on which site a mansion house formerly stood called Pond Head House". Among the parcels of land included in the sale were Two Oaks Mead, Calves Mead and Sawpit Close, all of which would have adjoined Parkhill Lodge (see Figure 9 on previous page).

During his ownership, Sturgeon mortgaged the property heavily and defaulted on repayment in 1850 when it was sold by the mortgage holders to Thomas Tate (aka. Teate). Tate was a Lyndhurst timber merchant and son of George Tate, who had inherited his father's land adjoining Pondhead upon George's death in 1836. Tragedy struck during Thomas Tate's ownership. In 1854, Tate's three-year-old daughter, Clara, went missing. For several days the police and neighbours formed search parties to look for her throughout the Forest. Initially it was thought that gypsies who had been in the area were responsible but after several days her body was found in a turnip field close to an outhouse at Parkhill Lodge. Her body was severely burnt with only cinders left of her clothes. The coroner ruled out foul play and concluded that she had been playing with matches which set her clothes on fire. Apparently, a few weeks earlier she had been found playing with fire near the spot where she was found.

By the middle of the 19th century the construction of a railway to London through the New Forest in 1847 opened it up to mass tourism for the first time. One of the most popular Victorian hobbies was butterfly collecting and by the 1850s the New Forest had become the premier location for the pursuit of butterflies and moths in the country. They were found in such profusion that publications of the period report clouds of butterflies "falling live leaves from trees in autumn". The railway brought many avid collectors and at certain times of year the lodging houses of Lyndhurst would not have a bed to spare. London dealers sent men down on the train to collect them for sale and it was quite common for both live and dead specimens to be collected together with eggs and pupae.



NEW FOREST BUTTERFLIES & MOTHS
Ova, Larvæ, Pupæ, and (brod) Imagines supplied to order by
G. TATE and SON,
Entomologists, Lyndhurst, New Forest.
Established 1870.
Instructions given in Practical Entomology. Correspondence invited.

Figure 10 - Entomologists Record & Journal 1908

There were even dealers in Lyndhurst High Street to cater for the huge demand as can be seen from the advert below (*Figure 10*). Coincidentally, it shows that the business was established in 1870 by G. Tate & Son. Whether they are the Tate family of Pondhead is not established but it would have been quite normal practice for trading names to continue, often long after the death of the principals (George Tate died in 1836). Pondhead, with its easy access from the village, did not escape the attention of the entomologists and there are some reports that the inclosure was a magnet for collectors.

From inspection of contemporary land conveyances, some of the old fields adjoining Parkhill were gradually conveyed back to the Crown several years after the initial oak plantings, to form the inclosure boundary as we know it today. These included Two Oaks Mead, Calves Mead, Sawpit Close, all shown on the map (page 15), plus others totalling around 30 acres which adjoined Parkhill Lodge. From this it appears that the oaks were planted in stages over several decades in the first quarter of the 19th century. Although originally destined for shipbuilding, in 1860 HMS Warrior, the first iron clad warship, was delivered to the Navy and within a few years, warship design changed forever and no longer required 2000 oaks to build a modest naval ship. Consequently, the oaks planted in Pondhead remain standing today, as they were never required for shipbuilding.

The leasehold of Parkhill Lodge was excluded from the newly created Pondhead Inclosure which took place when Pickering was still the leaseholder. By all accounts, the original lodge was a relatively modest property and it remained so until 1859 when it was leased by Captain William Morant from Thomas Tate and subsequently purchased by him in 1863. Morant was Keeper of the New Forest Hounds and a former Captain in the Grenadier Guards. He was a member of the Morant family of Brockenhurst Park Estate who, like Pickering, had made their fortune from sugar plantations and their slaves. They owned some of the largest plantations in Jamaica and a large estate of around 200 acres directly to the east of Brockenhurst village. The bulk of this family estate was inherited by William's elder brother. During his occupation of the lodge, William enlarged the property considerably, turning it into a grand mansion.

Morant sold the substantially enlarged property in 1877 to Henry Smith Wright for £9450. In 1890 Wright let the property to Willingham F. Rawnsley who ran it as an exclusive school for boys between 1890 and 1902 (Park Hill Preparatory School for Boys). There is little available information on Rawnsley although we do know that he was the nephew of an Arctic explorer and acted as a page boy at Lord Tennyson's wedding, so it appears that his family were well connected. This is borne out by the fact that two of Queen Victoria's grandchildren were educated there – Prince

Alexander of Battenberg and his cousin, the Duke of Albany. Around the turn of the century, one of the teachers was A.F. Tschiffely, who went on to become a renowned adventurer and explorer, gaining fame for riding by horse from Argentina to New York City. In one of his publications, he wrote "Park Hill is an expensive and therefore exclusive preparatory school. Thirty five was the number of pupils the school ever had in the course of one term and among them were several princes and the others were the sons of wealthy social and political figures. The buildings and surrounding parkland was old and stately".

TWENTIETH CENTURY

While all the major changes were taking place in and around the area during the 19th and 20th centuries, the new Pondhead Inclosure must have become an area of relative peace and tranquility as the old field system that once belonged to the farm was overplanted with oaks while the Mine House Grounds sector remained an ancient beech wood. Currently, Pondhead has the largest stand of hazel coppice left in the New Forest and it is possible that when the oaks were originally planted some would have been under planted with hazel as this was an established silviculture practice, although the size of the current coppice stools (stumps) suggest that the hazel was planted later. For many centuries, hazel coppice woods were widespread throughout Hampshire as it was a fast-growing tree, producing a new crop of timber on a 7 to 10 year cutting cycle. The hazel rods (branches) produced provided valuable building materials for hurdle making, thatching spars and the wattle for wattle and daub walls.

Alongside the Pondhead woodland, Park Hill school continued into the new century and when the Rawnsleys left in 1902, the school continued for a further 18 years, run by Charles E. Ridout as Headmaster and in 1920 it reverted back to a private residence when considerable further improvements were undertaken by the new owner, Sir Stephen Leach KCMG, a retired diplomat. On Sir Stephen's death in 1925 the house was sold and occupied by John Franklin Thomasson and his wife. He descended from a well-known Lancashire family of cotton producers and was briefly a Liberal MP. He built a model farm on the estate – the present Pondhead Farm. Model farms were a Victorian concept usually built by agriculturally knowledgeable landowners to show their less fortunate neighbours and/or tenants, the way to increase their income through new farm buildings, new technology and improved farming methods. Thomasson died in 1941 and the model farm was sold off during the 1950s.



Figure 11 Park Hill Lodge

The first half of the 20th century was a turbulent one. One in which troop assemblies, manoeuvres, exercises and camps became regular happenings in the New Forest as Britain prepared for and fought two World Wars. In September and early October 1914, the largest gathering of troops the Forest had ever seen, encamped at White Moor immediately across the Beaulieu Road from Pondhead Inclosure. They formed the 7th Division, which became known as the “Immortal Seventh”. It comprised of regular soldiers who, at the outbreak of war, were based at overseas garrisons in various locations in the British Empire. As they returned to the UK, they assembled at White Moor over a period of several weeks before marching to Southampton to embark on the awaiting ships which took them to France. When fully assembled, the division would have comprised around 15,000 men and it is said that on their March to Southampton, the head of the column reached the docks while the rear of the column were still on White Moor.

As the war progressed the Forest was used increasingly by the military and in 1915, a grenade and mortar school was established at in the area adjacent to White Moor, known as Southern Command Bombing School and immediately across the Beaulieu Road from Pondhead. Given its proximity, doubtless many soldiers found their way across the road into the inclosure. Interestingly, even today military ordnance still comes to light on the site of the bombing school requiring the attention of the Bomb Disposal Squad.



Figure 12 - 7th Division on White Moor

The Forestry Commission was established in 1919, to increase the amount of Britain's woodland which had been severely depleted during the war that had just ended. This is when they assumed responsibility for the management of Pondhead inclosure from the Commissioners of Woods.



By the time of the Second World War from 1939 onwards, the Forest became full of military personnel and equipment, both overtly and covertly with some even top secret, although there is no record of any troop activity in Pondhead. However, perhaps this carving (right) on an old beech was done by a soldier in the build up to D Day. Prior to D Day in June 1944, thousands of soldiers and military vehicles assembled throughout the

Forest under cover of the trees wherever space was available. Those encamped in the New Forest were British and Canadian troops who were destined to land on the

Gold, Juno and Sword beaches of Normandy. The whole of the Forest area was referred to as Marshalling Area B with its HQ based at the Balmer Lawn Hotel, only two miles from Pondhead. During this period Parkhill Lodge was requisitioned by the National Fire Service.

An unexpected consequence of both wars was the revival of the charcoal making industry in the New Forest, as substantial quantities were required for water filtration and smokeless fires in the trenches during the First World War. From pre-Roman times, charcoal production had been an important Forest industry, but it had virtually died out by the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of war. Fortunately, there were still a few men who knew how to produce charcoal in traditional earth clamps having learnt the skills from their fathers. Following a sharp decline in demand after 1918, it soared again during the Second World War when every civilian in the country was issued with a gas mask containing charcoal filters. Ring kilns were introduced for the first time just prior to the Second World War to speed up the charcoal process. After the end of hostilities in 1945, most New Forest charcoal sites ceased production except for a few commercial operators.

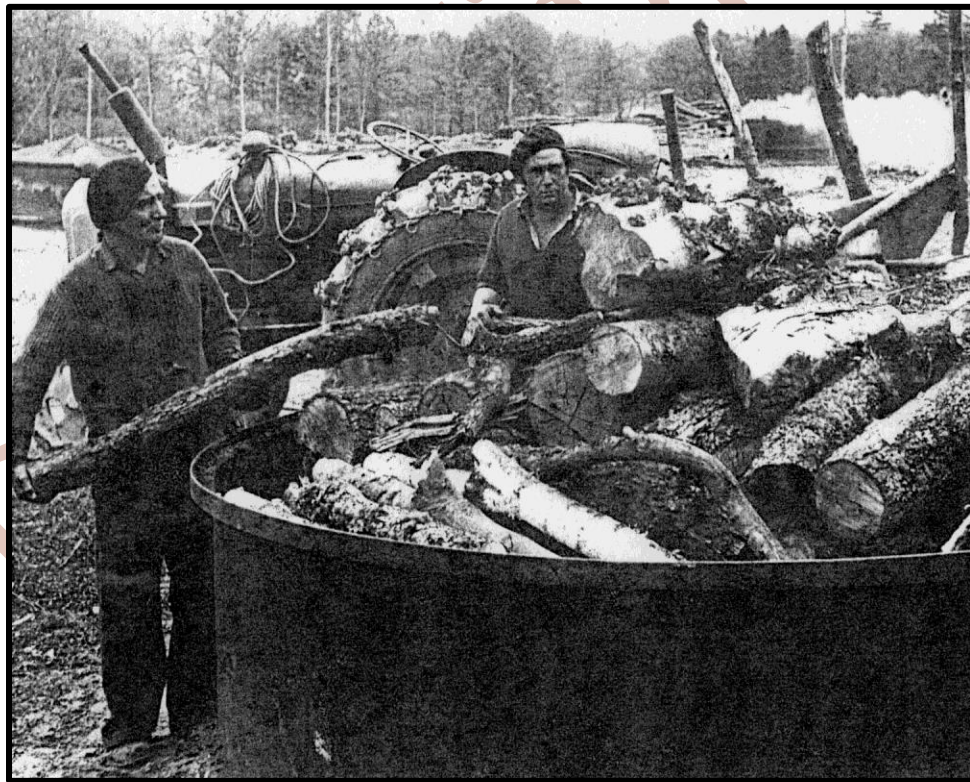


Figure 13 - Charcoal Production in Pondhead with Charcoal John & Laurie Gardner

No record has been found of charcoal production in Pondhead during either war, but wartime records are often sparse or have been destroyed. The main reason for

the industry's ultimate decline during the second half of the 20th century was restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Agriculture on felling hardwoods which resulted in a lack of raw material for the burners. Coincidentally, we know that the last of the commercial operators in the Forest were based in Pondhead Inclosure. Two local charcoal burners, John Carter, known as Charcoal John, and Laurie Gardner (*Figure 13*), made charcoal there in the early 1970s after the Forestry Commission had felled some over-mature and dead trees in the inclosure, which presumably had little other commercial value. Many locals of a certain age still have fond childhood memories of the charcoal burners in the woods at Pondhead, reminiscent perhaps of the scene from "Swallows & Amazons". The site ceased operation by the mid-seventies ending the long history of charcoal burners in the New Forest – or did it?

After the Second World War, Parkhill Lodge was bought by Colonel James Hargreaves, who had served as an officer on the North West Frontier in India during the First World War. He converted Parkhill into a hotel, and it remained in his ownership until he sold the property in the early 1970s. It remained as Parkhill Hotel for many years under different ownerships until it closed in 2006.

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

After major investment in the main house and new outbuildings costing several millions of pounds, it re-opened as Limewood Hotel in 2008, the most expensive and luxurious hotel within the New Forest. In old English, the name of Lyndhurst comprised the words lind ('lime tree') and hyrst ('wooded hill') – Limewood. The Limewood Group is currently in the ownership of billionaire industrialist, Sir Jim Ratcliffe who, in 2018 was named as the richest person in the UK, in the Sunday Times "Rich List".

Today, after more than 900 years since William the Conqueror formally established the New Forest as a royal hunting ground, Pondhead Inclosure remains a Crown freehold area of woodland – one of only a few such areas that are left in the Forest. The significance of this freehold status is that it is not subject to any common rights of grazing. Consequently, ponies and cattle have been excluded since the early 1800s at least, and this gives rise to a much different woodland landscape to that found over the rest of the Forest. In most wooded areas of the New Forest, a distinct browse line created by ponies, cattle and deer can be seen reaching from the woodland floor to the lower boughs of trees. This creates an absence of any significant understory of flora and smaller tree varieties, whereas Pondhead contains many spring flowers, particularly bluebells, together with a dense understory of shrub beneath its standard oak and beech trees. For this reason, Pondhead is a good comparator of

what the Forest would look like without grazing animals, although without them we would lose the area's internationally rare and important lowland heaths.

Despite being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Pondhead Inclosure received only minimal attention after the 1980s, due to its lack of commercial value and constraints on Forestry Commission resources. As a result, much of its ride (track) structure became overgrown and its area of old hazel coppice, the largest remaining on the Crown land of the New Forest, was in danger of dying out. The hazel coppice under a canopy of oaks covers around 40% of the inclosure, in the area that once contained the fields of the original Pond Head Farm.

In 2004, Dave Dibden, with permission from the Forestry Commission, started to coppice this the hazel again, to conserve it and improve the woodland's wildlife habitat with the help of a few volunteers. Since 2014, this restoration work has been continued by Pondhead Conservation Trust, a conservation charity and community woodland project set up by Dave and Derek Tippetts. The Trust operates under a



license from the Forestry Commission and run entirely by volunteers. By reference to old maps, most of the old overgrown ride structure had been restored as of 2018 and the majority of hazel coppice was back in active cutting rotation. The Trust aims to manage the woodland for the benefit of wildlife

using old traditional methods wherever possible. In 2014 they re-introduced the centuries' old industry of charcoal production back into the New Forest and back into Pondhead after an absence of over 40 years. Nowadays, they use an environmentally friendly retort kiln that produces high quality charcoal in a day. This is sold entirely within the New Forest during the spring and summer through a network of independent retail outlets. Current production levels are between 4 and 4.5 tonnes per annum.

The success of Pondhead Conservation Trust and its work in the community has been recognised with awards at local, county and national levels including recognition by the Royal Forestry Society. In June 2018, it was announced that the Trust had been awarded the “Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service” – the MBE for voluntary groups.



For further information on our work, please visit our website

www.pondheadconservation.org.uk

Derek