

THE STORY of the MARKEATON BROOK.

From Mercaston to the River Derwent.

By Don Farnsworth.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

To the people who live in the country to the west of Derby I offer my apologies for the title of this book. This is due the fact that the large majority of those who live near the brook do so in Derby and experience tells me that very few of them are aware it has other names and would not realise the connection if they heard them. As the object of the book is to inform as many people as possible their attention has to be drawn to something they do know. Hence the title.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Writing history is always difficult as we rely heavily on archaeology and the accounts left to us from the past to piece together the physical situation at any given time. This exercise has been harder than most as the subject matter is a brook about which, apart from the numerous floods in Derby, very little has been written. Over two thirds of it are in open countryside where little of recordable merit seems to have occurred. Experience from previous projects tells me that much unwritten history exists if it can only be found; experience also tells me that a good way to find it is by talking to the people who live in the area. The result is that much information has been acquired while having the pleasure of meeting people who are pleased to find an outsider taking an interest and who are really keen to share their knowledge and to have it recorded while others working on their own projects have given freely of their own research. Also included in the acknowledgements below are those who willingly gave me access to their property for investigation and photography. Without them much of what follows would not be included and for their generosity I am very grateful. As it would be unfair to list their names in order of importance relative to the knowledge imparted I have simply entered them alphabetically. To any I have inadvertently omitted I offer my thanks for your contribution and my apologies for the omission. My thanks then to: Val Beech, Charles Clark-Maxwell, Maxwell Craven, Hon. Richard Curzon, Adrian Farnsworth, Janet Gilks, Vikki and Angus Haddon, Chris Harris, Mark Higginson, Ron McKeown, the late Fred Munslow, Derek Palmer, Beverly Rhodes and Sue Woore. Also to Trish Kenny, Paul Hudson and Mark Young of Derby Local Studies Library and Anneke Bamberry of Derby Museum and Art Gallery for the generous use of documents and illustrations in their collections.

Don Farnsworth 2008.

INTRODUCTION.

Derby has always, to a large extent, been governed by water. It is built around the River Derwent which flows through it from north to south with the old part of the city on the west bank. In fact, until the nineteenth century, virtually the whole town was on the west side of the river. In the first century AD the Romans had settled to the north on the west bank and later on the east bank at Little Chester. Following the Romans' departure in the fifth century the invading Saxons settled in the area and they founded a group of separate villages whose names, in modern form, are still retained in the various areas of the city - Alvaston (*Alewaldestune* - Alwald's farm), Boulton (*Boletune* - Bola's farm), and Osmaston (*Osmundestune* - Osmund's farm) being examples. There was also a central one called Northworthy (*Norðweorðig* - North Enclosure) situated in the Irongate - St. Mary's Gate area, but all were to the west of the river. Northworthy, which eventually became the nucleus of Derby, gradually expanded until the core of our modern city was formed but by 1610 it was still little more than half a mile from north to south and rather less east to west. This situation remained with little change until the impact of the industrial revolution and the advent of the railways caused a massive expansion of the central town to accommodate the new industries and the necessary housing for the workers. The town expanded until those early villages were absorbed and eventually became, in much enlarged form, the suburbs of our modern city of Derby. Over a mile to the east across the river (*Cedesdene*) Chad's Valley, now modern Chaddesden, and still further east, Spondon, (*Spondune*) have been taken within the city boundary.

The River Derwent is a tributary of the larger River Trent a few miles to the south. In its own turn the sixty mile long Derwent is fed by other smaller rivers such as the Ecclesbourne and the Amber as well as numerous brooks and minor streams. One of those tributaries, the Markeaton Brook, flows through Derby's centre and over many centuries has had a marked effect on the life and development of the city. For Derby it has always been a mixed blessing, being of great benefit over hundreds of years as a source of running water for various purposes including power to drive mills, fishing, bathing and, in the days before sewers, the removal of effluent, while intermittently causing havoc and even death by flooding. Most Derby people know that it runs under the main streets of the city centre and that its reputation as a source of serious disruption and damage is well deserved. Beyond that very little appears to be known, which seems a good excuse for finding out more about it - things like where does it come from and has it any history or features of interest other than its unwelcome tendency to overflow periodically?

What follows is an attempt to answer some of those questions using whatever information is available including old documentation and maps. Unfortunately, both these sources can be unreliable in what they do and what they do not tell us. We are dealing with a long period of history during which only important items were documented and of those records many have since been lost or destroyed leaving us with huge gaps in our knowledge. In particular maps with inconsistent detail and occasional blatant error are a source of considerable frustration while variations between some of those listed here seem to defy explanation. The main ones used for this exercise are John Speed's 1610 map of Derby, the town plan from Burdett's one inch to the mile map of the county 1767 reprinted 1791, Moneypenny's 1791 version which may well have been based on Burdett's, E.W.Brayley's 1806 map and W.M.Rogerson's 1819 detailed 6"map of the town. These were followed by the Borough of Derby Map surveyed for the Board of Health in 1852. Scale was sometimes arbitrary; within the town Speed gives a '*Scale of Pafes*', which is actually surprisingly accurate, and Burdett a '*Scale of Yards*' but other early ones leave us to work it out for ourselves. Rogerson's 6" one carries a proper scale while the Board of Health map is scaled at 24" to the mile. Speed's plan of the town, originally included in the corner of the county map, has been copied and enlarged several times over the years with varying degrees of error being introduced. Fortunately an original has been used here. Where old sources are quoted the original spelling and grammar have been retained.

As this book deals to some extent with flooding it is ironic that one potentially major source of information, the Markeaton estate records, which had passed to the borough corporation in 1929, were themselves destroyed in the flood of May 1932. An important feature which appears in the following pages, and of which there is scant record, is the watermills which drew their power from the various streams to be mentioned in this account. Windmills were not introduced into the county until at least a hundred years after Domesday so there can be no confusion whatsoever with any of the mills there in 1086. Watermills were very important to the economy for at least a thousand years yet we are left in ignorance of the siting or even existence of some of those on the brook. What is obvious from the little history left to us is that during that period some pre-Norman mills disappeared from the scene, some survived, albeit in rebuilt form, and other later ones came and went almost without trace. Today only one remains, converted to domestic use. Early in 2007 the television 'Time Team' investigated a former mill site (not local) of which nothing was visible on the surface. In fact it had been demolished as recently as the 1960s yet after that relatively short period the site and the leat were no longer visible even from the air. No wonder some of the really old sites are now untraceable.

Recorded mills. In presumed order from source to river.

Mugginton. There in 1086. Site unknown.

Mercaston (Old). Possibly on the site mentioned for Mugginton in 1086. Mill built c1230. This one also known later as Mugginton Mill.

Mercaston (New). Origin unknown, first potential reference 1550. Now private dwelling.

Weston Underwood. Origin unknown, gone by mid 19th century.

Little Ireton. There in 1086. Site unknown.

Kedleston. There in 1086. Moved in 1760s during emparking. Resited near boundary with Markeaton. Demolished.

Markeaton (Village). Possibly there 1086. Demolished pre 1800.

Markeaton Mill (Derby). Built c1818-19 as paint works on site of a corn mill, possibly ancient. Rebuilt 1912 as textile mill and named Britannia Mill but not water driven. Buildings still extant. Possibly the mill mentioned in the Domesday entry for Markeaton.

Nuns' Mill/St. Mary's Mill. (Corn). Possibly there in 1086 as one of ten in Derby. Recorded by Hutton in 1791 on page 145 as "St. Mary's-mill (Nuns mill)." Demolished early 20th century.

Nuns' Mill (Silk). Built 18th-19th century, demolished 1960s.

Twigrist Mill/St. Mary's Gate Mill/Cuckstool Mill. Possibly there 1086 as one of ten in Derby. Demolished late 19th century.

Copecastle Mill, possibly there in 1086 as one of ten in Derby. Shown on Speed's map on Tenant Brook close to where Markeaton Brook met the river.

BACKGROUND.

The first facts to emerge are that the brook's total length is slightly less than nine miles, flowing mainly through very pleasant countryside, and that many people other than the inhabitants of Derby have, from at least Roman times, been very dependent on it for their livelihood. It should be understood that distances given are approximate as the tortuous winding and twisting of the brook makes accurate measurement virtually impossible. It is currently divided into three named sections, Mercaston, Cutler and Markeaton Brooks, the latter occupying rather more than a third of the total length. However, it was not always so called. In the 12th century (in the foundation charter of Darley Abbey, 1140) the whole length was known as the *Oddebroc* (perhaps Oddi's Brook) but later this was applied only to the Markeaton section, the rest being Cutler Brook. Not until 1662 is there a mention of *Mircaston Brooke* and in 1690 we get the first recorded reference to *Marston (Markeaton) Brooke* although various forms of *Oddebroc* were still in use in the mid 18th century. According to the Derbyshire Advertiser of 22nd August 1924 the town's oldest residents still referred to it as the Odd Brook.

MERCASTON.

In common with big rivers the brook starts very small and grows as it travels. There are several minor streams near its upper end but one apparently unnamed stream seems to be the source. This rises from a spring at SK256452 near Scout Lane at Hulland Ward. It flows south east for about a mile and a half to Mercaston Green and somewhere near here, according to all maps consulted, it becomes **Mercaston Brook**. This is hilly country and on all sides the land slopes down to the brook, all excess water draining directly into it. From Mercaston Green it runs south eastward for the next one and a half miles to the boundary with Kedleston during which distance it is joined by five more brooks. These are Black Brook, Hungerhill Brook and Greenlane Brook which feed in from the north and two from the south, all of which will be mentioned as we progress.

The first of these, a small unnamed brook which rises on Brailsford Common, joins from the south at Mercaston Green. A quarter of a mile further east Black Brook feeds in from the north where it originates about three miles away as Waterlagg Brook having risen from a spring at SK268467. Already, barely two miles from its source, Mercaston Brook has been joined by two others and one of these, Black Brook gave a flow of water sufficient to feed a pool which in turn provided a head of water to drive a water mill. At this early stage and in normal conditions none of the brooks is currently fast enough or deep enough on its own to drive a mill of any size without a pond but there is evidence in places further down that some straightening has been done to help the flow and in Derby in the 19th century at least one silk manufactory had its wheel driven directly by the brook. On Burdett's 1791 one inch map a mill is clearly marked by the brook close to SK273430 at Mercaston and in 1956 an archaeological investigation found, in a 'boggy morass', outline traces of a mill dam a little to the west of the lane to Schoolhouse Farm. This is roughly a mile to the west of the present mill. The mention of a mill indicates the presence of a community so at this point we should, perhaps, have a look at the history of the area.

In common with most of the villages round here Mercaston, *Merchenestune*, perhaps Merchiaun's Farm, is named after a Saxon but that does not preclude the possibility of earlier occupation of which we have no record. Prehistoric sites and artefacts have been found over much of the county although habitation sites are rare in the south due to at least fifteen hundred years of agriculture. The Romano/British utilised any good agricultural land; they were certainly at Mackworth, Mickleover and Thurstaston and many more local sites surely wait to be found. The incoming Saxons introduced the rotational field system of farming where large fields were divided into ploughed strips of which there are many fossilised examples locally. By the time the infamous Domesday Book was compiled in 1086 115 manors in the south of Derbyshire had been given by the king to Earl Henry de Ferrers as one of his favoured subjects, the majority of previous owners being simply dispossessed. In turn de Ferrers sub-let most of his manors to others.

Prior to 1086 Mercaston had been held by Gamel but was currently leased to Roger and Robert. It seems to have been an average agricultural manor of about five hundred acres with only one feature of relevant interest, the *site* for a mill, a feature which is not uncommon in Domesday. Mills were very important to the community for the grinding of their cereal crops and also gave the manorial lord power over any nearby manor without a suitable water supply. These had to rely on the nearest one with a mill to help out and even with neighbourly co-operation such help would have come at a price. An example was at Foston which had two mills, one of which seems to have been built close to Church Broughton where there was no viable water supply. The Domesday Book records Mickleover (*Ufre*) as having two mill sites but to date there is no known record of there ever being a watermill there although one of the sites *may* have been identified on the Bramble Brook at SK323354 (referred to on Speed's 1610 map as Olde Brooke). What is uncertain is what is meant by a 'site', whether it was merely a designated area suitable for development or whether it was a ready prepared leat or mill pond with inlet and outlet requiring only the actual building and machinery.

Whether the Mercaston mill site mentioned in Domesday is the same as the one investigated in 1956 we do not know. What we do know is that this site is on the Mugginton side of the brook at the southern end of Ravensdale Park, one of seven deer parks within the Royal Forest of Duffield Frith, which is historically and archaeologically very important. Large areas of the park have, unfortunately, been badly defiled by extensive long term gravel workings and at the time of writing permission is being sought to extend these. This would be disastrous to the park. The park was defined by a boundary bank with a palisade on top which was known as the park pale and much of this is still traceable. Within the pale are the sites of a royal hunting lodge, a deer course, an extensive fishpond/lake and a mill with its pond. These last two features are now silted up and overgrown leaving a very wet area which is designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest mainly for the variety of plant-life it contains.

In 2003-4 the park was investigated with a view to making it a scheduled ancient monument and as a result we now know a little more about the mill site. The first reference to it was in c1230 when rights were granted to build a mill and fishpond there. This latest investigation has confirmed, to the west of the lane to Schoolhouse Farm, the existence of earthworks for a mill dam and the buried remains of a mill with its pond fed from Black Brook and tailrace draining into Mercaston Brook. The site is mainly concealed under the 'boggy morass' referred to earlier. Readers considering investigation are warned that while the OS maps show a footpath through this area it is difficult to find on the ground and that the boggy nature of the land here is not overstated.

We now know the origins of that particular mill to be of the 13th century but this does not tell us whether it belonged to Mercaston or Mugginton. Nor does it help us with the situation in 1086 when there was apparently no Mercaston mill nor what subsequently happened to the Mugginton one.

In practice the absence of a working mill at Mercaston in 1086 was not so serious as may at first appear as the entry in Domesday prior to Mercaston is that of Mugginton, also of Saxon origin. *Mogintun*, (farm of Mogga or Mugga) which is geographically adjacent to the north of Mercaston with the brook as their common boundary, had also been held by Gamel and had a mill as well as a church and a priest. It was currently leased to Ketel. This mill, belonging to the same lord, would have served two manors in a similar manner to the one at nearby Markeaton which served Mackworth. The present Mercaston mill, a mile to the east, *may* have been the site mentioned in Domesday but as will be shown shortly there is reason to date the origins of this second mill to somewhat later. However, without evidence all this is pure surmise and the author would be pleased to receive any information which could clarify the situation.

It has been suggested that the site referred to above at SK273430 (hereafter the 'old site or mill') was, in spite of the 1230 charter, a reinstatement of the site of the Domesday Mugginton mill (of whose site and demise we know nothing) and deeds and charters pertaining to the Radburne estate show this to be a possibility. As well as Radburne the Chandos Pole family owned land in both Mugginton and Mercaston and in 1336 Edward Chandos was Lord of Mugginton. Bearing in mind the known existence of Mercaston mill, an entry in the Radburne papers could lead to the thought of two mills being co-existent for a couple of centuries:

1. Lease for six years by Richard de Covelond (Culland) to Robert son of William de Attelow and others of a moiety (share) in the watermill at Mugginton with special conditions as to the grinding of his own corn and the repair of the mill. All Saints Day, 1318.

However, a later entry indicates quite clearly that just one mill belonged to both manors with the confusion above being caused by the writer using only one name for a jointly shared mill:

2. Grant by Nicholas Kniveton to Margaret Knyveton his mother of Mircaston manor, with the moiety of a watermill in Mugginton and Mircaston. 20 November 1447.

These charters show us that although a Mugginton mill was still working well into the 15th century it was not the Domesday one but the c1230 one which was also known as Mercaston mill. So far these are the only direct references to the Mugginton mill although there are records of *le Milnefeld* in 1221 and a field name *le mulneflat* in 1381. We must remember that in much old documentation the names and identification of sites depended on the whim of the writer. As an example a 1792 print entitled Markeaton Church is without doubt a picture of nearby Mackworth church.

In 1791 Burdett does not show the 'new site' in Mercaston yet 127 years earlier, in 1664, a deed refers to the 'mill and its watercourses'. The 'old mill', at SK273430 had a pond or dam (there is a field named Mill Dam and the Dams are recorded in 1634) while the other, presumably later 'new mill' at SK285419, still has a winding three quarter mile long leat, (or lade on the 1901 OS 25 inch map; other names for mill streams are mill fleam and mill race or tailrace although the latter normally applies to the outflow) somewhat reduced and silted, which fits the 1664 description. This leat which originates at SK280425 was obviously designed to join the Wildpark Brook coming in from the south thus adding to the flow reaching the millwheel. What is notable is that at one point it cuts through existing ridge and furrow thus postdating the medieval ploughland but by how much is impossible to say. In a 16th century charter we learn of a '*Lease for 21 years by Jno Kniveton of Mercaston to Robert Jurdan of Weston Underwood of a cottage and the watermylne with ye gryst, waterstreme and flogdges etc. in Mercaston. 26 July 1550.*' This again sounds very much like the 'new site'.

This whole situation is probably quite simple but complicated for us by the fact that the people concerned in the documents all understood perfectly what was being said and needed none of the precise information so desirable to us in our research. In the meantime, roughly half way between the mills, Hungerhill Brook has joined Mercaston Brook from the north.

Greenwood's detailed map of 1825 shows only the existing 'new' site while the first one inch Ordnance Survey map of 1836 refers to Burdett's site as Mercaston Old Mill and the later one as Mercaston Mill. The OS map also shows that Mugginton currently had a windmill at SK286424 which is still commemorated by Mill House. The 'old' Mercaston water mill has gone but the 'new' one, probably rebuilt c1800 and listed as Grade II still stands, pleasantly restored and converted to a residence, having worked till about 1920, its watercourses for many years feeding a trout hatchery.

Shortly after this point the fifth brook, Greenlane Brook joins from the north. Thus, after only about three miles, we have six brooks combined into one, trapped in a steep valley, and all heading for Derby. And in wet weather that amounts to a lot of water.

Before moving on we will look briefly at the two villages mentioned above but without going into detailed history – this is, after all, the story of the brook which has served them for many centuries. **Mugginton** is situated on a steep south facing hill, the majority of the houses bordering on the single lane. At the lower end the church has some very early remnants in its fabric; the west wall with its tiny window would have been familiar to Gamel who was there before Domesday Book was commissioned. In the churchyard is an even older feature, a yew tree estimated to have been there for fourteen hundred years. Of the medieval village there is little trace and we may assume most of it to be under the present one or to have vanished under later agriculture. Similarly, of a hall there is neither trace nor record apart from an entry in the gazetteer of Craven and Stanley's Derbyshire Country House, Volume I, 1982 where the map reference (SK283429) places it just to the north of the church. Sometime in the 18th-19th centuries a windmill was built and Mill House still marks the location. There is a welcome hangover from the past, that increasingly rare feature, a village school and at the top of the hill, in the junction with Bullhurst Lane, is a popular hostelry, the Cock Inn.

Mercaston seems to have consisted of two parts, the village and an area known as The Green, a situation also found at neighbouring Kirk Langley. Burdett and other 18th century maps show many cottages strung out along the road eastwards from The Green towards the ‘new’ mill and the sites of some of these are still visible from the air. The hall is situated a short distance to the west of this mill and is the successor to the house built by the Kniveton family who had earlier acquired Mercaston. In the adjacent fields to the north west of the hall, in the angle with the lane to Mugginton, are distinct traces of the early medieval village centred on about SK278424 and aerial photography shows this quite clearly. Today Mercaston has shrunk to a few houses and farms (some of them modern) spread along the lane, far less populated than in medieval days, but still showing continuity of settlement. Schoolhouse Farm, a former Dame School, indicates the provision of local education in the not too distant past, basic though it may have been.

KEDLESTON.

Along here, near Mercaston Mill, the north bank of the brook forms the boundary with the manor of Weston Underwood whose name originated as West Farm under, or within, the wood. Prior to 1086 *Westune* was owned by Wulfsi, who was dispossessed in favour of Henry de Ferrers after the conquest, but although the manor was partly bounded by the brook it had no mill. Soon after the point where Greenlane Brook joins the main stream from the north Mercaston Brook crosses the manor boundary and enters Kedleston where it becomes **Cutler Brook**, a name which still requires an explanation. Here it is travelling south east, a direction it maintains uncompromisingly until it reaches Markeaton. During its journey through Kedleston the flow is augmented by only one other, the Blind Brook, which starts about a mile and a half to the north near Windley at SK305437. Prior to 1086 *Chetelestune*, Ketil’s farm, another of Henry de Ferrer’s acquisitions, had been owned by Wulfsi and Godwin. It had about two hundred and fifty acres of arable land and a mill.

Just outside the northern edge of Kedleston Park is Ireton Farm (*Iretune* - the Irishman’s Farm) and in the adjoining fields are traces of a small village site. In the medieval period this was Little Ireton which in 1086 had a mill and in later years was part of the manor of Weston which may explain why Weston itself had no mill in 1086. This is the only known record of the Ireton mill and its site is quite unknown. It could have been on either Cutler Brook or Blind Brook. Weston also acquired a mill sometime later close to SK290418 but the dates of its origin and demise have not been found. It is locally remembered in the field names Mill Flat, Mill Meadow and Mill Lane Close. Aerial photographs show that the medieval village extended south to a point somewhat nearer the mill than the present one does.

In 1086 Kedleston was held by Wulfbert yet by about 1100 it had passed to Robert de Curzon in which family it has remained to the present day. Quite a record. They must have moved in and built a house soon after this date as the church was built in the twelfth century although only the typically Norman south doorway remains as evidence of this. There was certainly a large house there c1600 and from that has developed the magnificent hall of c1761-70 which graces the site today but that is another story; we are concerned with the brook which so far has been joined by six tributaries, between them supporting six mills. In the 18th century the rebuilding of the hall and the landscaping of the park caused major changes at Kedleston which affected the brook and, fortunately, of these we do have some knowledge.

On entering Kedleston, Cutler Brook passed through a typical landscape of medieval fields and woodland of which traces of the ridge and furrow are still visible in the park. In the 17th century the hall and church stood together where they do today with the village sited along the old coach road which came from Derby via Markeaton Stones and passed quite close to the north of Kedleston Hall, between it and the brook. An undated newspaper report tells us that “at Kedleston the high road went by the gates of a water mill that stood on the brook in the midst of the village, while old Kedleston Hall stood close by...” John Ogilby’s 1698 ‘Illustration of the Kingdom of England’ (our first reasonably accurate road atlas) correctly

shows the village astride the road with the hall and mill on opposite sides of it although the direction of the stream is quite wrong. As well as the mill the village had a forge and an inn.

The 18th century was a period when emparking was fashionable and Kedleston was landscaped twice; between 1719 and 1726 Charles Bridgeman turned the brook into a canal with formal gardens leading to an octagonal lake to the north of the road. All this appears on an estate plan of c1721 showing what is probably the mill a little to the north east of the hall. There was a rectangular pond near the mill and a possible tailrace into the canal. Between 1756 and 1759 William Emes, a talented local contemporary of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, redesigned the park and some years later in the 1760s the brook was widened into a mile long lake with cascades and islands, crossed by a beautiful Adam bridge. Towards its south east end the lake became a large a fish pond. The coach road was moved to outside the park and today its old course is only traceable near the drive to the west of the hall. The mill was demolished in 1760-62 and also during emparking the village was moved to the edge of the park. In 1789 John Pilkington, in his book 'A View of the Present State of Derbyshire', saw that the mill had been moved to a considerable distance from the house. This new site was at the extreme south east end of the lake but for how long it survived there we do not know. Time to move on.

MARKEATON.

The south eastern tip of the Kedleston fish pond almost touches the boundary with the next manor, that of Markeaton (*Merchetune* – Mearca's Farm) and from thereon the brook is called **Markeaton Brook** until it reaches the river in Derby. However, because of the dramatic change in its environs this section is divided into two parts; the rural stretch from Kedleston to the edge of Derby, for which a convenient boundary is Queensway on the A38 Derby ringroad, and the urban stretch through and under the city to the river. Having travelled through Kedleston in a basically south east direction the brook now turns rather more steeply to the south until the edge of Markeaton Park is reached from where it resumes the south easterly line to its confluence with the Derwent.

Markeaton Brook – rural.

In the rural section the brook collects more water, partly from two small streams which rise near Quarndon to the north (*Cornun* or *Quern Dun* – hill where millstones were obtained although evidence for this is sparse) but mainly from the Mackworth Brook which itself stems from smaller streams rising either side of the A52 Ashbourne Road near Meynell Langley. This roughly triangular area is bounded by hills at Mackworth (*Machevorde* – Macca's Enclosure) and Allestree (*Adelardestreu* – Adelard's Tree) and is therefore liable to flooding, a fact which has been demonstrated with devastating effect on numerous occasions. Ironically both brooks have in the past had sluices built across them with the deliberate intention of irrigating this land as the deposited silt enriched the soil. The subject of flooding will be discussed later.

Mackworth Brook joins the Markeaton one a little to the east of Markeaton Lane in Aldercar Wood in Markeaton Park and the junction is clearly visible from the Mundy Play Centre. The brooks pass under bridges on Markeaton Lane which are both thought by some to be medieval. The parapets may well be rebuilt of their original stone blocks but a look underneath reveals their basic construction to be later. The enclosure map of c1740 shows that Mackworth Brook ran about a hundred yards to the south where its old course can still be traced trickling under the lane and through Aldercar Wood behind the park nursery gardens. It has been partially straightened and diverted since then. Below the parapet the bridge, built entirely of stone, could be of 18th-19th century origin so this would be new when the brook was diverted. It has since been patched in places with both old red brick and (regrettably) modern blue brick. Three hundred yards to the north Markeaton Brook also passes under a stone built bridge but in spite of its pleasing appearance a cursory inspection shows the arches to be of 1930s concrete pipe construction rather than medieval.

Not far to the east of the junction of the brooks and adjacent to Markeaton Hall and village is the site of an ancient mill (SK334377) which possibly dates back to Domesday. There is a natural fall in the land about here and the leat is contained in a six feet high embankment to maintain it at the natural level of the confluence of the brooks. There was a sluice to control the flow to an adjacent stream (possibly the original Markeaton Brook although it does not appear on the 1740 estate map) running below and alongside the leat; these features are still intact today. Once past the mill the brook flowed on to Derby and this situation existed until sometime after the mid 18th century. About 1760 much of Markeaton village was moved and the park landscaped by William Emes during which process the brook was widened to form a serpentine lake similar to the one at Kedleston but on a much smaller scale. This is possibly when the mill was removed. The fact that it appears on Burdett's 1791 map is not proof of its existence; this was a revised reprint of the 1767 edition and deletion from a printing plate was not easy; also we should not forget that he had already omitted the long standing Mercaston 'New Mill'. Perhaps the mill previously on the site of Britannia Mill, three quarters of a mile to the south east, took the place of the one in the park as it was then still on land owned by the Mundys. This one will be discussed in due course. During the 18th century the estate also had a windmill, hence Windmill Hill Lane. This sort of information may well have been contained in the boxes of estate records which perished in the 1932 flood.

By 1900 the OS map referred to the lake simply as Markeaton Pond. It was longer and narrower than the present one but in 1929 the park came into the ownership of the people of Derby and in the following years the lake was re-cut to its present width. At the same time it was shortened when Queensway was built across the eastern end as part of the Derby Arterial Road (now the A38). The end of the old lake can still be seen on the town side of Queensway. Also about this time the mill site near the hall was landscaped as a rockery with a waterfall, at the foot of which the brook passes under the reconstructed mill bridge which is dated 1800. Between the waterfall and the road the old rebuilt wheelpit can still be seen. This contains a small wheel which was installed in the 1920s to drive a pump for watering the gardens.

Markeaton appears in Domesday Book as a well endowed manor with a mill, a church and a priest. It was held by the Touchet family from the 12th century till 1497 and from 1516 to 1929 it was owned by the Mundys after which time, on the death of Emily Mundy, the hall and park passed to the people of Derby. The hall was regrettably demolished in 1964 but the park still belongs to Derby and is much used for recreational purposes. About a mile to the west is **Mackworth** which in 1086 was an outlier of Markeaton. The site of its medieval village is still impressed on the fields and the late 15th century castellated gateway of its manor house is a prominent feature on Lower Road. Standing solitary in its field at the east end of the village is the 14th century church which is listed as Grade 1 for its architecture and the unique collection of Chellaston alabaster.

FLOODING.

Before we follow the brook into urban Derby, this seems a good point to consider the subject of flooding. The previous pages have shown that the brook is situated for the whole of its length in a valley which is sometimes quite narrow. This results, especially after heavy rain or snow, in a large volume of water being concentrated into the brook right from its source, via its seven main tributaries, all of which flows to the River Derwent (usually swollen by the same rain or snow) and the only way for it to get there is to pass through the centre of Derby. We will start with a look at the situation to the west of the city round Markeaton and Mackworth. This area, including Markeaton Park and village, has always been subject to heavy flooding and must have been a matter of great concern to the local land owners and farmers. Even as recently as November 2000 it was inundated.

Although no records survive, presumably sometime in the first half of the 19th century, a flood relief scheme for Markeaton seems to have been introduced. Rogerson's detailed 6" map of Derby dated 1819 does not show these new cuts which must therefore post date the map. This consisted in cutting a new stream from near the head of the mill leat to run about a hundred yards to the north of and roughly parallel to the lake. It still passes under the junction of

Queensway/A38 and Kedleston Road and from there to Mackworth Road Recreation Ground in Derby; this is now officially the Markeaton Brook, not the one through the lake which appears to be nameless. At the same time another cut, the Daisy Bank Brook, was made even further to the north running from near Markeaton Lane round the edge of the park to where it rejoins the new Markeaton Brook close to Queensway thus effectively putting the Mundy Play Centre on an island. These deeply cut streams, both controlled by sluices, must have taken a lot of flood water away from the park and the land to the west **BUT**, and it is a very important **BUT**, when the new brook reached the area which is now the recreation ground at Mackworth Road, it rejoined the old one which had passed through the lake and the whole lot was concentrated back into the narrow open stream which ran through the streets of the town thus adding to an already serious situation there. This state of affairs continued until the 1930s.

At this juncture we should perhaps have a look at this ‘serious situation’ to get some idea of why the brook has earned its reputation. We must remember that on most, though not all, occasions when the brook flooded so did the river Derwent (plus at times the river Trent) and their combined effect could be quite lethal; also that areas of the town away from the brook suffered directly from the river. Reasonably reliable records go back only a little over four hundred years and we have little knowledge of the situation prior to that. However, there may be some clues and they will be discussed at the end of the following catalogue of watery disasters. Where indicated, entries below are taken from Glover’s History and Directory of the Borough of Derby.

1346

“In the Trent valley between midsummer and Christmas, ‘long continued rains’ caused very serious flooding.” This must surely have affected Derby.

1587

“A grate flood. St. Mary’s Bridge broken down and the Mills at the bottom of St. Michael’s Lane carried away...” There can be no doubt that Markeaton Brook also flooded.

1601

In a great storm the steeple of St. Werburgh’s fell but the damage to the church was so great that it is considered that the subsequent floods were responsible for most of it.

1610

“This year, owing to a sudden rise of the Markeaton brook, three prisoners confined in the gaol, were drowned.” *Glover*. The gaol was built against the brook by St Peter’s Bridge with the basement cells below street level.

1611 – May 14th

“There happened such a land flood from the Markeaton brook, that in the memory of man the like was never seen.” *Glover*.

1659

“The lower parts of the town were almost drowned.”

1673

“A great flood upon the Markeaton brook, carried away the hay, filled cellars as high as the Angel, Rotten Row, and broke down three of the ten bridges. St. James’s bridge was landed at the Sun Inn, St.Peter’s Street.” *Glover*. St. Werburgh’s church was also inundated and a church warden’s account indicates that a flood of such magnitude was... “*not known in our agge before...it came into Cheasts and wett all the writtinge.*”

1677

St. Werburgh’s was flooded.

1698 – November 5th

“A great flood which washed down part of St. Werburgh’s church and the steeple fell.” *Glover*. A contemporary account tells us that the water... “*getting into the ground, hollow and loose by the graves, occasioned some of the pillars that supported the body of the church to give way.*” These were the graves within the church.

1736

“A great flood on the river Trent.” *Glover*. This also affected Derby as St. Werburgh’s church was again damaged.

1740 – December 11th

“A great flood in Derby. On Tuesday last, we had the greatest inundation of water here that ever was known, occasioned by the falling of a great quantity of snow and rain, which began on Sunday, and continued (almost without intermission) till Tuesday morning, at which time several streets, and all the rooms upon the ground floor were laid a great depth under water. Great damage was done to the houses and furniture; several walls were thrown down; bridges and great quantities of wood carried away, and numbers of cattle swept from pastures perished. The parish church of St. Werburgh received considerable damage, it having made so great a breach in the pavement throughout the church so as to require it to be new paved. At Alvaston a man attempting to save his cattle perished.” (*Glover*.)

1741

According to Wilkins’ “Walk Through Derby” the Markeaton Brook flooded “when the skies were set at liberty after being bound a whole year by the keen east wind....”

1763

“Three several floods on the river Derwent, within a few days, which are more than the oldest man can remember to have happened in so short a space. The highest flood on the river Trent, owing to the late heavy rains, known since 1736.” *Glover*. We can assume that Derby suffered from this.

1795

“A great flood on the Trent, Swarkeston bridge washed down.” *Glover*. The newly erected Long Bridge connecting the towpath across the river Derwent in Derby for the still unfinished canal was washed away before it came into use.

1842 – March 31st

“During the last half century there have been many heavy floods on the Markeaton brook, and the rivers Derwent and Trent. But it falls to our lot to record the most disastrous flood on the Markeaton brook that ever occurred in the memory of man, and one the least expected. On the night of March 31st 1842, the rain fell in torrents, and about 3 o’clock in the morning of the first of April, the Markeaton brook began to rise, and rose so suddenly and rapidly, that few of the inhabitants had timely warning of their danger. The sudden rise of the brook soon filled the cellars, laid many of the streets under water, and filled the houses and shops in the Corn market, Victoria street, part of St. Peter’s street, St. James’s lane, Wardwick, Curzon street, part of Sadler gate, Bold lane, part of St Mary’s gate, Jury street, Walker lane, Willow row, Ford street, Agard street, Friar gate, Bridge street, Brook street and Morledge. In many of the streets the height of the flood was from 1ft 7 in. to 6 ft., according to their levels, viz. Corn market, 5ft 6in., St. Peter’s Street, lower part, 4ft 6in., Victoria street, 4ft 7in., Becket-well lane, 5ft 2in., Wardwick, 4ft 3in., Curzon street 3ft 4in., Cheapside 4ft 5in., Friar gate 3 ft 9in., George street 4ft., Sadler gate, lower part, 5ft., Jury street 5ft 9in., Willow row 6ft., Ford street 4ft., Brook street 4ft 6in., Bridge street 3ft., Agard street 3ft., Morledge 2ft 10in., Tenant street 3ft 6in., New market and Derwent street 1ft 7in.” *Glover*.

The modern press are known for their use of slick headlines and catchy phrases. The old established Derby Mercury in rather more pedantic terms referred to the flood as “probably the most calamitous inundation.”

Reputedly the local watchmen, the forerunners of the police force, toured the town and the densely populated West End shouting warnings that the brook was rising but this was in the early hours of April Fool's day and not everyone took them seriously. Whether that really contributed to the situation we will never know. Even if they had taken notice it is uncertain where the people could have gone. In the unfortunately named Brook Street a woman was drowned in her house. Yet again St. Werburgh's suffered and needed repaving. John Keys in 'Sketches of Old Derby and Neighborhood', witnessed an incident in which a cow keeper, driving cattle and riding on one of them, was nearly swept away by the torrent, being rescued near Sadler Gate Bridge by a man leaning from a bedroom window. The cows fortunately survived on the hump of the bridge.

This flood seems to have been caused directly by the excess rainfall over the hills to the west of Derby with the result that a massive amount of water was trapped in the steep, narrow valley with only one way out via the brook through Derby. On this occasion the river did not overflow and the whole disastrous situation was centred entirely round the brook. Later that year Herbert Spencer, the well known philosopher, produced a plan of a relief tunnel from roughly the east end of Markeaton lake to the river near Chester Green but his idea was not taken up by the corporation.

1931 – September 3rd

Massive cloudbursts across the county caused the worst floods in Derby for fifty years. People in streets near the Markeaton brook were marooned and even vegetables washed from nearby allotments floated in the streets.

1932 – May 23rd

After excessive rainfall Derby was again devastated by flooding causing massive damage. "The worst in living memory." Where have we heard that before?!

There have been other floods since then, particularly in 1965 and again as recently as 2000, and much damage done but this was mainly round the Chester Green area and none has closed the city centre. In the above list of disasters one feature stands out and that is St. Werburgh's church which suffered severe damage at least seven times. The question has to be asked "Why build a church so close to a brook so prone to flooding?" To answer that we have to look back a long way to Saxon Derby.

The church was not built alone but as the centre of a parish with dwellings and farms and businesses, occupied by people who lived closer to nature than we do today. They would have chosen a viable place to support a community, certainly not a flood plain. Let us not forget that about a mile to the west Markeaton was also built by the brook so flooding was not a problem in those days. In Domesday Book of 1086 there are recorded 38 vineyards in England which indicates a much milder climate than we enjoy.

Scattered all over the country there are sites of deserted medieval villages and in 1968 one to the west of Derby at Barton Blount was archaeologically excavated. The evidence revealed, in the form of drainage channels, showed that from a pleasant climate in pre-Norman times the weather had deteriorated so badly, and turned so cold and wet by the 13th–14th centuries, that the farmers could no longer grow crops to sustain themselves, hence the desertion of the village. Even the first date on the list above falls in this period. Of course we cannot be certain but this may well be when the flooding started and the parish of St. Werburgh became a less favourable place to live. We must also take into account the fact that at some time prior to 1086 a mill and its associated water courses was built less than a hundred yards away to the west of the church.

After the 1932 catastrophe more flood relief was clearly needed and in 1938 a new scheme was opened and remained in use till 2006 when it was modernised. This consisted basically of two concrete funnels near Markeaton Lane, one for each of the Markeaton and Mackworth brooks, which feed into a twelve foot horseshoe shaped tunnel. From there the tunnel passes deep under the hill to the east and travels, partly along the line of Broadway, about a mile and

a half to Darley Park where it empties into the river. At the top of Broadway the tunnel is 100 feet below ground. It has been noticed that relieving the Markeaton brook adds considerably to the volume of water in the river which is not a lot of comfort for the people of Little Chester who have still suffered in recent years in spite of a lot of flood defences. As part of the 1938 scheme a new embanked road was planned through Markeaton, bypassing the village and acting as a flood barrier. Unfortunately this part of the scheme was not completed with the result, as we have already seen, that the area is still liable to flood and the otherwise quiet little hamlet is badly affected by the volume of modern traffic for which the narrow, winding lane is totally unsuited. It would, of course, be quite unfair to blame the authorities in 1938 for failing to foresee the drastic increase in traffic sixty years later but completion of that road would have been of enormous benefit today. In 2006 the Markeaton Lane intakes were rebuilt and the whole length of the scheme was refurbished and modernised. Due to modern safety standards this has resulted in the erection of a lot of unsightly metal fencing which certainly does not blend into the landscape.

Markeaton Brook – urban.

We now enter Derby. For a little over half a mile the brook can be seen and followed but then goes underground until it reaches the river but we will, for now, consider only the open brook prior to culverting. Until the commencement of culverting of c1837 it had been navigable and boats came as far up as Brook Walk to deliver to, and collect from, the mills on what is now Agard Street. More will be said about that as we progress.

Prior to the Domesday survey Derby had fourteen mills but by 1086 this number was reduced to ten, none of which was individually mentioned, and only by deduction from later documents can we put names and sites to any of them. At least three seem to have been on Markeaton Brook, one on the later Britannia Mill site, one near Nuns' Street and one at the bottom of St. Mary's Gate. Certainly there were mills in the vicinity as William Hutton, in his 'History of Derby' published in 1791, tells us "In 1272 the nuns (of nearby Kingsmead Priory) are said to have let three mills on the Hoddibrook.... They must have been Markeaton, St. Mary's and Cuckstool mills". Markeaton Mill was the one on the Britannia Mill site (not the one in the park) which had ceased to grind corn before 1818 but of its history we have no knowledge whatsoever although it is possible that this is the one recorded in Domesday. In the same book Hutton informs us on Page 145 that St. Mary's mill was also known as Nuns mill which survived until early in the 20th century near Nuns' Street. Cuckstool was sited opposite the bottom of St. Mary's Gate. These three will be mentioned again.

Speed's map of 1610 shows two of these, without naming them, and also the ten bridges that crossed the brook between Nuns' Street and the river plus three more over mill leats. Speed's map also shows an apparent mill race cutting across from what is now Albert Street to the stream which runs on the west of the island known as the Holmes. This was Tenant Brook and it was recorded in 1648 as *the Fleame*. The map shows a group of buildings, one straddling the water and marked with a wheel, near the river end of this which was possibly Copecastle Mill, (was this also one of the Domesday mills?); by 1791, on Moneypenny's map, it had been covered over and built on. The stream which turns the Holmes into an island was mentioned c1712 by William Wooley in his 'History of Derbyshire'; describing Cockpit Hill House he tells us "On the west side of the mill stream is a good house...." Again in 1900 it appears on the OS 25 inch map as a mill race. Whether it was natural or man made is unknown but Buck's East Prospect of Derby, 1728, shows sailing boats on it and at one time (Moneypenny 1791) there were lock gates to maintain the level for water traffic into the river above the weir. Stonework in the area may be part of this structure. Both 1791 maps show a wharf and copper and iron mills with a bridge over it. Back to the brook.

To the east of Queensway is the remaining end of William Emes' lake and beyond that the first quarter mile of the stream from the lake is known as the Mill Dam. This was the Markeaton Brook but had long since been widened into a mill pond and embanked to maintain the water level above that of its natural level. By 1819, according to Rogerson's

map, it was in use as power for the Markeaton Paint Mills (SK342368) which superseded the corn mill referred to above. They were so named as they were built on Markeaton Street (at that time Markeaton Lane) which was then still in the manor of Markeaton and we have to consider the possibility that this was the one mentioned in Domesday Book, not the one by the hall. Various publications refer to these colour works as standing on the site of an 'ancient mill' with one public information plaque even stating that it is mentioned in Domesday Book but this is speculation and there is no documentary evidence to support the statement. We do not know which mill was referred to in the survey.

Markeaton Mills were demolished in 1908 and four years later Britannia Mills were built on the site by the hosiery company of Moore, Eadie and Murcott Goode but were not water powered. Even so the mill leat was not quite redundant as records show there was a water driven turbine on the site which was still in use in the mid 1930s. The stream within the mill grounds has since been filled in and is currently under two car parks. There are people who believe that the mill wheels still exist under the building but the author is reliably informed by the owners that nothing now remains.

The mills were so named after the statue of Britannia which surmounted the cupola on the corner but which was regrettably removed some years ago. The buildings still exist on the corner of Markeaton Street and Mackworth Road and were for some years used as Derby University School of Art and Design. Across the brook from the mills are the childrens' play grounds, given by Emily Mundy of Markeaton Hall early last century for the use of children under ten years of age with the proviso that the brook was to be unfenced so that the children could sail their boats.

As previously stated the outflow from Britannia mills was joined by the diverted Markeaton Brook immediately to the east of Mackworth Road where they converge in the overgrown remains of an outdoor swimming pool. This pool, which as part of the Mackworth Road Recreation Ground was opened in the late 19th century, was also the gift of Francis and Emily Mundy and had changing cubicles for women on one side and for men on the other. A few yards further on the 1901 OS 25 inch map shows a stream breaking to the left down a weir with a sluice to control the flow and this was the original brook. The other stream going on then widened into a curved mill pond which powered the former Nuns' Mill (sited at SK343367 and probably one of the Domesday mills on the brook) less than a quarter of a mile downstream from Britannia Mills. In 1180 this was *Sirrevismulne* (Sheriff's Mill) but since 1150s had been let to the abbot of the newly founded Darley Abbey. During the ensuing years the monks were endowed with gifts of land and property and presumably by this means the mill eventually passed, via the abbey, into the ownership of the Nunnery (or Priory) of St. Mary de Pratis (St. Mary of the Meadows) at which time it was called St. Mary's Mill. The nunnery was founded c1160 close to the brook, on land known as King's Mead, as a sister house to the abbey but by c1250 it had become independent. Of the nunnery a tiny fragment in the form of a bricked up stone doorway remains in an old house on Nuns' Street. Nuns' Mill was demolished fairly early in the 20th century having reputedly ended its days producing narrow fabrics. The sluice has gone but the weir still stands high and dry with the stream curling round it. The millpond is also gone, having been filled in and part of the area covered by allotment gardens.

In the 18th-19th centuries silk became big business and a number of factories were established in Derby. The best known was John Lomb's 18th century mill on the river which still exists in rebuilt form as Derby Industrial Museum. Of the lesser ones two were at the end of Leaper Street in the area known as the West End and both were built on the edge of the brook near Nuns' Mill. At least one of these was water powered as the 13 feet diameter wheel was still there within living memory with the drive gear in situ inside. To complicate matters a little one of the silk mills was known as Nuns' Mill and the 1852 Board of Health 24" map of Derby has both old (corn) and new (silk) mills clearly labelled as such and less than a hundred yards apart. Both the Leaper Street mills were demolished in the 1960s-70s clearance of the West End.

Just to the east of the corn mill site the brook runs under Nuns' Street passing the attractive St. John's Terrace on its left and St. John's Church on the right before reaching Bridge Street. Beyond Bridge Street the brook continues fairly straight, passing through what, in the early 19th century, became an intensive industrial area. In 1791 both Moneypenny and Burdett show the brook making a wide curve to the north about here but this may be a cartographical error as it does not appear on Speed's 1610 map and was gone by 1806 when Brayley produced his map. This stretch is now Brook Walk and along here boats were used to transport goods to factories and stone steps to a former landing stage can still be seen. These are at the end of Searl Street and at the back of the site of the former Longdon's factory (now student lodgings) was another set although these have now gone. A cast iron bridge, built by William Searl c1812, once crossed from Searl Street but was shortsightedly removed by the council in the 1970s as being surplus to requirements. It has in recent years been replaced with a modern one of similar style to serve the mainly student population of the area.

To continue. In 1610, at a point a little to the west of modern Ford Street the brook split into two, the main stream becoming yet another mill pond. This was to serve a mill sited at about SK349364 where Bold Lane MSCP now stands at the foot of St. Mary's Gate, the third of the three probably identifiable as being on the brook in 1086. Its name changed over the years being recorded as *le Twygristmulne* c1240, *molendino de Twygrist* in the same century and *Twogryst milne* in 1330. The name seems to indicate that it had two sets of stones. In the 13th century it was leased to Solomon but this is no surprise as the mill was close to the believed site of Derby's Jewish community.

In the 17th century it was known locally as Cuckstool Mill because of the adjacent ducking stool. By 1740 it was officially the Borough Flour Mill but its old familiar name hung on and in 1741 the Derby Mercury reported that a child had drowned in the mill pond of Cuckstool Mill. In January 1785 the same paper advertised for sale a "Water corn mill at the bottom of St. Mary's Gate, occupied by Mrs Waterall". It was advertised again in 1845 as "Cuckstool Mill, with dam". In 1851 it appeared in Corporation records (DLSL DBR/D/190) as St. Mary's Gate Mill and it seems likely that local usage has simply shortened this to St. Mary's as there appears to be no record of it ever bearing that title officially. When it ceased working is unclear but the same Corporation minutes record it as still being in existence in 1873. Culverting of the Strand and Bold Lane must have sealed its fate soon after this date.

A point of interest here is that in 1610, on Speed's map there is, next to the mill at the foot of St. Mary's Gate, a dead end branch of the brook forming a wharf or dock. This indicates that waterborne traffic was reaching this far up the brook from the river even then and a conjectural engraving of presumably 19th century origin shows not only the ducking stool but also a mooring ring in the timber revetted bank. Unfortunately, at this point we are again beset by the vagaries of the mapmakers. Burdett and Moneypenny, who separately published maps in 1791, do not show this third stream nor does an unnamed map of 1841 but Brayley's map of 1806, Rogerson's 6" edition of 1819 and the 1852 Board of Health map all show that it had been extended to join the other two branches near Ford Street thus allowing boats to travel as far as Bridge Street, perhaps even as far as Nuns' Mill.

The tailrace of the mill and the other branch or branches of the brook by the mill then combined again close to the north side of St. Werburgh's church (much too close as we have already seen), passed under Saddlergate Bridge, along what is now the Strand, under St. James' Bridge, and entered Brookside, modern Victoria Street. Near here it was joined from the south by Olde Brooke, better known today as Bramble Brook. This rises at Mickleover (SK312352) and travels via Humbleton (*Humbledon*, Rounded Hill) close to where it now goes underground near Kingsway, to the south of modern Slack Lane, past the Friary where it fed the fish ponds, and under Bramble Street, where it was formerly the garden boundary of the high class town houses in the Wardwick, before turning down Becketwell Lane to join Markeaton Brook. This was in addition to other smaller streams joining at several points. Yet more water for the centre of Derby!

Brookside followed the natural curve of the brook to the junction with Corn Market/St. Peter's Street where St. Peter's Bridge linked the two. Part of the 18th century rebuild of this bridge was uncovered in October 2004 during strengthening of the culvert. On Speed's 1610 map this appears to have been a stone built bridge as it carried all the north-south traffic through Derby. From here there was a straight section of brook to Tenant Street Bridge, from which the Tenant Brook mentioned earlier diverged, then, after a sharp elbow to the right, a short stretch to the river. By 1791 this elbow had been removed, perhaps by natural means, and the brook went straight to the river where its now defunct outflow can still be seen in the River Gardens. Early in the 20th century this short section was still locally known as the Morledge Brook.

CULVERTING.

In the introduction mention was made of the brook being used to remove effluent and that statement has to include any other rubbish that was deposited in it. We know from many accounts of the past that, by our modern standards, most towns and cities were, to put it mildly, unhygienic with garbage and excrement simply dumped in the streets and we have no reason to think that Derby was any different. The brook and its tributaries would have been clean and full of natural life out in the countryside, unlike today when some parts such as Bramble Brook are virtually dead due to the chemicals from modern farming being washed into them, although efforts are being made to reverse this trend. Once within the town the situation changed dramatically with the brook being used as a depository for waste matter of all descriptions and it must have been pretty foul.

Having earlier discussed the flood situation we now have to consider the opposite scenario, the times of drought when there was little or no flow to clear the deposits away. We should also remember that drought could be disastrous to crops (see 1591 below) and even that which was harvested could not be ground if the water was too low to drive the mills. Although windmills were coming into wider use Burdett's first edition of 1767 showed only ten in the county so most people were still relying on watermills. They were hard times.

1354

"Parched Nottinghamshire suffered a great drought, no rain having fallen from the end of March to the end of July." Considering the proximity of Derby to Nottingham those conditions must have applied here.

1541

"A nationwide drought reduced the Trent and other rivers to the state of straggling brooks."

1591

"There was an uncommon drought which was exceedingly injurious to vegetation..... ..the Trent and other rivers were almost without water."

1661

"The river Derwent in Derby was so dry that its inhabitants crossed its bed dry shod."

1741

See this date under 'Flooding' when "the skies had been bound a whole year by the keen east wind...."

This sort of situation has for many years caused intermittent problems, over which man has no control, and will probably continue to do so. From the 19th century onward the population of Derby grew rapidly requiring new sewage and drainage systems to be installed and very gradually the situation improved; supplies of clean water also became more widely available. In the 1830s the decision was taken to culvert the brook, partly to reduce the stench of what was in effect an open sewer and partly to contain potential floodwater. Covering the brook also reduced the chance of disease spreading. However the job was done piecemeal with the

result that, in 1837, Brookside was covered with a brick built culvert from St. James' Bridge to St. Peter's Bridge and by 1841 had been renamed Victoria Street. The section now known as Albert Street came later with the few yards from Tenant Street Bridge to the river remaining open. This short stretch was eventually covered in the 1930s. It has since been diverted underground and now enters the river near the Holmes. The remainder of the brook to the west was left open for at least a quarter of a century as a photograph of the early 1860s shows the parapet of St. James' Bridge still in situ with trees behind it. The gently curving Strand, with its row of classically styled buildings and arcade, was opened in 1878 and by 1883 the area formerly occupied by St. Mary's Gate Mill had disappeared under the extended premises of the Derby Gas Light and Coke Company. Culverting, of course, brought to an end the use of water borne traffic on the brook.

Building the culvert must have been very difficult and dangerous work requiring much skill and over a period of years a number of workmen were killed by collapses but the resulting improvements achieved for the general public were considered well worth the effort if not the loss of life. In the end it was so well built that, although designed for horse drawn traffic, it carried the weight of modern doubledecker buses and other heavy vehicles until well into the second half of the 20th century when it had to be strengthened. The one exception was the unfortunate incident in August 1939 when a steam roller crashed through into the water under the Strand. Many photographs were taken and clearly visible by the edge of the hole was a sign declaring unequivocally 'LOCOMOTIVES PROHIBITED'!

Culverting created new streets and some fine buildings were erected in the new Strand, Victoria Street and Albert Street, thoroughfares which would not otherwise have received Royal Assent to bear the names of the queen and consort. The smell was gone and the town centre was a much pleasanter place and one of which the inhabitants could rightly be proud. However, any thoughts of the flood water being contained were rudely dispelled when, on April 1st 1842, the flood described earlier inundated the town centre. This, as we have seen, was repeated as late as 1932.

JOURNEY'S END.

That, then, is the basic history of the brook. It has flowed through its valley for thousands of years, mainly quietly but with intermittent violent outbursts although in nature even these are good as floods fertilise the land. It has seen the landscape evolve from untamed forest and wilderness to having mans' pastoral and urban orderliness imposed on it. It has been a source of life, a driving force for industry and over many years has given pleasure to countless children (and mums and dads!) for paddling, swimming, fishing and generally messing about in the water. Certainly the author did his share many years ago.

Within the town it also served as a disposal unit for waste matter over a long period when there was no organised means of disposal; unpleasant as that waste matter was it would at least have degraded naturally. Sadly, today even with all our modern waste disposal facilities, some people still find it simpler to dump rubbish in the brook; non-degradable metal cans, plastic products and the occasional supermarket trolley although it has to be admitted that this malaise is not restricted to the brook. One does wonder about the thinking (or lack of) behind this attitude towards what should be an outstanding natural feature in our city. During road improvement work in 2004, when St. Peter's Bridge was on temporary view, the suggestion was made in the local press that Victoria Street should be opened again and the brook turned into a major attraction in the city centre with tree lined banks and bridges. The artist's impression looked very good and the idea gained a lot of support but the city council didn't agree; in any case that minority attitude would probably spoil it for the rest of us and the brook is perhaps best left protected out of sight.

Don Farnsworth. October 2008.

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