

## Weston Turville Reservoir

The land incorporating Weston Turville Reservoir covers some 70 acres; it is now a rich nature reserve home to numerous plants, birds and animals.

Owned by the British Waterways Board it is a great place for natural history, walking, fishing and sailing. When built however its intended use was not quite so recreational.

In the 1790's "canal mania" was in full swing and a canal was created from Wendover through Halton and along the southern boundary of Weston Turville as a transport route out to the large markets of London and the Midlands and supplies, such as coal could be brought in much more cheaply than the road alternative. The construction was quite swift from its beginnings in 1793 to its completion in 1797.

The reservoir was constructed to create a steady flow of water to mills in Weston Turville and Aylesbury as the main source of water used before, from the river in Wendover was being diverted into the canal. Its usefulness in this respect was short lived as the Industrial Revolution soon brought much more efficient methods of milling.

The idea to use the reservoir to top up the canal was put into action and a well, heading and pipes taking the water underground were installed by 1814. Water was pumped by a steam engine to the branch canal for almost 25 years. Constant leakage from the Wendover Arm between Aston Clinton and Tringford caused this navigable feeder to be largely abandoned as workable after 1840.

The reservoir having been constructed quite quickly, in turn quite quickly became of little practical use to the Grand Junction Canal Company and to local financial backers and land owners.

In 1812 The Weston Turville Fishing Club was formed although it would appear 'Fishery at the reservoir' was recorded as early as 1808. The club was made up from local aristocracy and gentry with a maximum of 24 members. Records show there was a Club House and Boat House built and in the former a stock of wine was kept up with a special subscription fee of 1 guinea each. Interest and presumably funds reduced over the coming years and the club seems to have had a serious lack of interest and members by 1830.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century an inn named the 'The Golden Perch' was built in the south east corner of the reservoir for the use of barges on the Wendover Arm presumably for their rest and refreshment and for the overnight stabling of horses. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Inn had disappeared and a sizable house, now Perch Cottage had been built in its place.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the reservoir waters still came up to the banks and few trees or other obstructions were in place a series of cold winters enabled skating to take place on the formed ice. A Mr Paine would test the ice and skaters were only allowed on once its thickness had reached 3 inches. A painting by Alexander Jamieson shows just such a scene from 1929.

In the war years of 1914-1918 much of the surrounding land was offered for use as a camp for soldiers in waiting to go to France and a vast, muddy, tented complex was erected. The reservoir was used as a bathing place for soldiers and the stables at Perch Cottage used to home around a dozen soldiers who thereby managed to escape the mud and diseases suffered by their tented comrades.

In 1919, the current owner of the land having died the year before, the estate was sold to the Air Council very cheaply for £112,000. After the war the area used for training had been left in a somewhat poor state with fields still littered with barbed wire, trenches and sewage from the camps. Various sections of the land were sold off and became the airfield, playing fields for RAF trainees and housing for officers and their families, very much as it is today.

With grateful thanks to Tessa Taylor for allowing us to crib and reprint extracts from her book 'Weston Turville Reservoir: An Historical and Ecological study'

