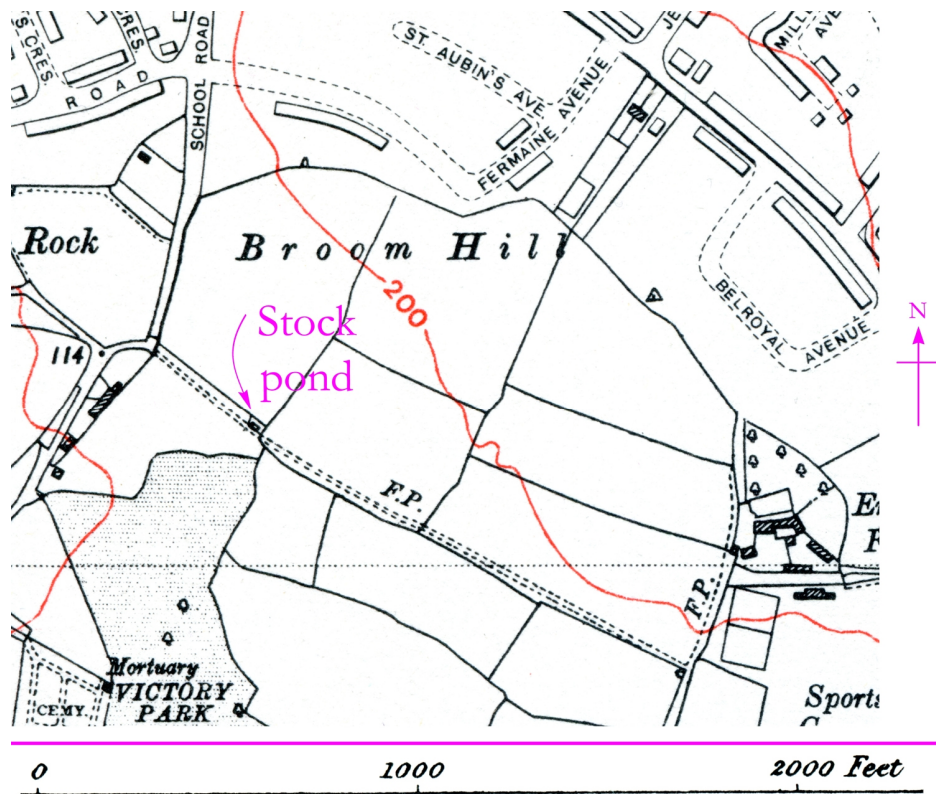


Some notes on a pond at Brislington Meadows

Ken Taylor (2023)

Stone walls beside a public footpath leading from School Road to Brislington Meadows are the physical remains of a rectangular water feature marked on old Ordnance Survey (OS) maps (modern grid reference: ST6245671107). The walls and regular plan show it to be artificially enclosed, which allows us to classify it as a pond (this word is related to the geographical 'pound' and their etymological root signifies an enclosure).



Location of the pond (provisionally interpreted as a stock pond) shown on an Ordnance Survey map published in 1938.

The site has good access and lies immediately beside a public footpath that runs roughly southeast from School Road (nearly opposite the junction with the road to The Rock) - to Bonville Road. The pond lies near the eastern end of the section of path from School Road to the modern metal 'kissing gate' at the entrance to the open fields of Brislington Meadows.

The site was visited and some measurements taken by local residents in September 2022 (following one of the driest summers on record). The surface of the area enclosed by the walls was a little below the level of the public footpath, it was largely free from living vegetation and was dry but not compacted, suggesting the soil just a little way below the surface was saturated with water (permanently waterlogged conditions may preserve organic materials that can be recovered by archaeological excavation). The water table here is high enough to let the pond fill naturally, without intervention (like a well).

Description of the pond

Masonry survives intact in the northeast wall, and south corner. Both areas are of grey Pennant sandstone, which is the local bedrock, and of rubble construction (which is simply to say the stones haven't been shaped into neat blocks of regular size and shape). The individual stones are bonded with a hard white mortar that contains many granules of angular black material (occasionally up to ten millimetres across) resembling cinders.



Surviving masonry in the northeast wall.



Surviving masonry in the southeast wall
(with a large, squared stone in the foreground).

The northeast wall is set into an earth bank that would have been created in digging the pond into the field's natural slope (or, perhaps a lynchet riser). This bank rises some 1.2m above the modern ground level, and the surviving stonework rises to around half that height and extends to at least 2.83m across. This wall leans back into the back at an angle from vertical of around 30 degrees, which may have been deemed sufficient to face the slope with stone and retain the soil.

The masonry of the south corner extends at least 1.33m along the southeast wall, where courses achieve some 0.5m in height; and at least 0.48m along the southwest wall, where courses are some 0.3m high. The thickness of the southwest wall was found (judging by its uppermost stone) to be 0.4m (16 inches).

The enclosed area contained some loose stones, as would be expected from its collapsing walls, but one stone was exceptional. It's partially buried but the exposed piece measured 0.62m long by 0.41m wide and 0.15m deep. The only complete measurement was the width which, in Imperial units is 16 inches. This stone was apparently painstakingly shaped to be a roughly rectangular block, with right angles in three dimensions at its corners, and straight parallel edges. Its purpose is open to conjecture. Its width, being identical with the measured width of one of the walls, permits interpretation as a coping stone. Such professionalism represents a significant investment of money in the design and building of this structure.

The distance between the inner surfaces of the southwest wall and the northeast wall was estimated at 4m (vegetation hampered measurement) and, when the width of its walls are added, the structure would total around 4.8m (nearly 16 feet) across its short side. No fourth wall to the pond was visible above ground but the six-inch to the mile OS map published in 1884 (Somerset Sheet VI.NE, surveyed 1882 to 1883) shows the long side would measure roughly 9m (30 feet). These figures suggest the pond may have been built to be twice as long as it is wide.

The missing fourth wall of this pond can be accepted as a feature of a stock pond. These were often constructed with three walled sides and a ramp at the open side - giving livestock a gentle slope to access the water. Such stock ponds were regularly lined with a floor of cobbles or stone slabs. The author has been informed that in a separate probing exercise the build-up of soil is around 0.6m deep above a stone base.

A suggestion has been made that this is actually a cart or wagon pond, a stone structure containing water that was used to prevent the wooden components of cartwheels from drying out sufficiently to shrink away from the wheel's iron rim (causing the rim to come loose and detach). This hypothesis was initially deemed attractive due to the pond being located near one end of what appears to be a medieval route between the hamlet of Rock (and a medieval house at nearby Wick) and the market town (and local administrative hub) of Keynsham. Wagon ponds are usually 'drive through' structures with a separate entrance and exit. Although the present-day structure has only a single opening, this may have been a later modification that changed its function from wagon pond to stock pond. Wagon ponds are significantly rarer than stock ponds, and, if this is indeed an example, it would represent a significant feature of local heritage. Further investigation is required to settle this point.

Dating evidence

The pond isn't shown on the tithe map of 1846, but the field is described in the tithe apportionment as a pasture called Middle Broomhill, owned by John Hurle (BTM&A 1846). A

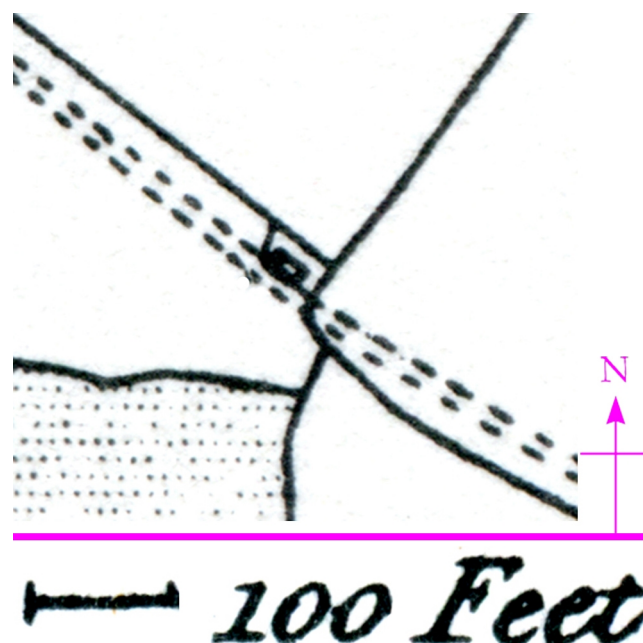
comparison of the tithe and 1884 OS map shows the pond would have been at the southern corner of the field, which the tithe map shows had a boundary following the line of the modern footpath to School Road.

Middle Broomhill was used for pasturing livestock, its boundary prevented the animals from accessing a nearby watercourse (a tributary of Brislington Brook) in the field to the south owned by John Jones. Middle Broomhill lacked a natural pool (the tithe map did show pools, but there wasn't one here), so the animals would require a pond.

Putting a date of construction on the pond isn't easy. We may presume it was there in 1846, and the creation of this waterless field almost certainly pre-dated the 1778 Act that enclosed Brislington Common (Middle Broomhill lay in an area loosely designated as 'Brislington Old Enclosures'). But, beyond that, all we can really say is that it's post-medieval.

The question 'when did this stock pond fall into disuse?' is easier to answer because the 1884 OS map shows the southwest boundary of Middle Broomhill has been removed, which would give livestock access to the natural watercourse just to the south.

The 1938 OS map shows a barrier (presumably a fence) has been installed immediately to the west of the pond, blocking the entrance. This map also shows a new field boundary has been created to the north of the footpath, once again preventing stock in the field to the north from accessing either the natural watercourse to the south of the footpath or the pond. Further research is required to determine whether this is due to the field being put to a different use and no longer pasturing animals, or an alternative water supply was installed for their continued use. An aerial photograph (published on Know Your Place) dating to 1946 shows the field to the north being filled with allotments, which are still there to this day.



The sides of the pond are parallel with the footpath and field boundaries, whereas the barrier across the entrance is slightly at a slant (Ordnance Survey 1938).

When the pond no longer served a valued purpose, it would have begun its journey into disrepair and, after a century and a half of dilapidation the fact that anything remains above ground at all, is a tribute to the old philosophy of 'building things to last.

Bibliography

Two excellent, free map resources (used in this research) are Know Your Place, Bristol City Council (<https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp>), and Map Finder, National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/geo>).

BTM&A 1846, *Brislington Tithe Map and Apportionment*, Bristol Record Office, EP/A/32/9.

Ordnance Survey 1938, *Provisional Edition*, Somerset Sheet VI NE, (resized from 1:10560, 6 inches to the mile).