

Charter Analysis

When Alex Langlands was working with us on the charter bounds he gave us a copy of the spreadsheet he compiled for his PhD. In it he analysed the boundary clauses of charters for estates in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon. We followed his example for the charters we examined in the Lower Test Valley. Each point on a boundary circuit was represented by a separate row on the spreadsheet recording the Old English text, a translation, and grid references for mapping. By importing the data into QGIS it has been possible to produce maps of the estate boundaries with individual points labelled in either modern or old English. More importantly QGIS gave us the opportunity to assess the boundary points in relation to the LiDAR, geology and earlier OS, tithe and estate maps. We made many adjustments to our initial (informed) guesses as to the location of the individual points.

We have used Alex's spreadsheet as a template for recording the charters in our area. We have not considered its value as a data source. In it he analyses about 90 Wessex charters. I think it would be useful to use this data to help us interpret the meaning of particular words that appear to be controversial - **scyt** and **fleot**. As well as looking at individual words I want to consider the starting points of boundaries. I have prepared a spreadsheet of the initial clauses of Alex's charters which I will circulate. A few of them included the bounds of two separate parcels of land, so have two starting points. In almost every case the circuit returns to the start, so I have not matched the start and end clauses in my spreadsheet. My discussion below uses the data from Alex's spreadsheet to help understand the charters we have examined in our study area, particularly the Romsey charter.

Observations on Starting Points

Most of the boundary clauses start by going first (**Ærest**) to (**on**) or from (**of**) a point. I don't think the use of *to* rather than *from* is of any relevance. Clearly you have to go to a point before you can go from it. The circuit proceeds by going to and then from each boundary marker. There is no suggestion in the initial wording to indicate how one would get to the starting point or why it was chosen. A boundary clause describes a (usually) clockwise circuit from a selected point and back to that point. Any of the markers used to describe the boundary could have functioned as the start/end point. What factors determined the choice of a starting point?

A variety of features serve as starting points. The wording suggests some topographical and man-made features were referred to by a place name. The charter for Little Bedwyn starts 'to the east of the valley called Cyman's dene' and Iwerne Minster at 'Tarrant dene'; South Hams and Ipplepen both start at 'boundary combe' - the absence of the definite article suggesting these were place names. Culmstock starts 'in front of hook head hill' and Downton at 'crow quarry'. 'Plunder lord barrow' at Crux Easton and 'battle mound' at Whitchurch must have been prominent features. 'Beekeepers' meadow' at Abbots Worthy seems to be another well known location referred to by a place name.

Some starting points are quite ephemeral. The boundary of one parcel of land at Kilmeston starts at 'the ash stub', Coombe Bisset at 'the old withy' and Stratford Tony at 'the willow'. There isn't much chance of identifying the spot 'where the post stands' or stood at Wanborough or 'the three posts' at Treable. Also lost are the locations of Compton Abbas' 'tor shield gate', Ham's 'flax lea gate' and Ottery St Mary's 'street gate' along with its 'boundary hedge' and 'the well'. Where and what was the 'Wiswuthe tree' at Little Dart? Modern roads are likely to preserve the course of the 'herepath' and 'the white way' at Sanford and '**weall weg** - British way' at Burbage. Bradford-on-Avon's boundary begins, quite charmingly, at 'the seven pear trees', adding the useful information that they were 'on the hereway that shoots (**schet**) southward'. Why ever did the boundary at Collingbourne Kingston start 'fourteen yards beneath the pit'?

Half of Alex's charters start on a river, naming either the river itself or a specific location on the river. There are six references to bridges. Crediton and Sandford both start at Creedy bridge, both bridges over the Creedy. The latter boundary runs 'by the herepath from Creedy bridge'. Was the sandy ford replaced by a bridge as part of the work on the herepath? Fontmell had a wood bridge. Sorley's bridge was called 'king's bridge' and two Bishopstone charters start at 'Bicca's bridge'. Do the personal references indicate who was responsible for having the bridge built? We can't tell which king gave his name to Sorley's bridge on the Avon, either Edgar, who granted the estate (S704) in 962, or one of his predecessors. Bicca must have been a person of much lower status. The word, presumably a nickname, means Bitch. The first charter to mention this bridge (S522) was a land grant of 947.

Fords occur more frequently than bridges as the starting points of the charters in this data set by a ratio of about 3 to 1. Most of the fords are referred to by name. Three Bishopstone charters (S229, S393 and S275) dating to 862, 905 and 948 began at 'street ford' on the Ebble. These describe a different piece of land than the Bicca's bridge charters. Westwood had a stone ford, probably a description of the stream bed. Tichbourne and Beauworth each had an 'elder (**ellen**) ford', Newton St Petroc a 'wood ford' and Odstock a 'flax ford (**linforda**)'. I don't know why an elder tree would be associated with a ford. Some names such as wood or flax might reflect the main products that were transported over them. There were two fords (**tywfyrd**) at St Mary Bourne. The meanings of Stoke Canon's '**sulforda**' and Ottery St Mary's '**taelenford**' are unclear. The fords at Creedy Barton and Wyke in Shobrooke both cross 'goblin brook (**sceoca broces**)'. The Bemerton boundary starts at 'the otter hole' and proceeds to 'hay ford'. Easton's boundary also starts on a waterway, at 'Edmund's weir'.

The starting point of a boundary clause presumably indicates the location where the 'surveyors' gathered together to set out on a circumlocution of the boundary. Bridges and fords were located on routeways, so they would have been convenient places for a group to assemble. Where a river formed a part of the boundary it would not have been necessary to physically navigate it. A river is a relatively stable feature in the landscape. People would be well aware of its course, so there would be no need to define intermediate markers along it. Imagine a D-shaped estate with a river running along the straight side of the D. A clockwise circuit of the boundary would start at the river on the top of the curve and end when it reached the river at the bottom. The Michelmersh charter bounds followed this pattern. It starts on the Test at the north of the estate and ends on the river farther south. The Test can be assumed to be the western boundary. Unusually, the bounds don't return to a start point. It couldn't since no specific location on the Test was specified. The boundary proceeds from the Test up to 'yew combe'. The position of the start was indicated by its proximity to a definable location in the landscape. Presumably there was no distinctive feature on the river where it met the boundary.

A boundary clause is not a description of a country walk. It is part of a legal document. The description of the boundary could be referred to if a dispute arose concerning land alongside the boundary. Points identified during the survey would have been noted by a scribe who would then have constructed the written clause.

Romsey's Northern Boundary and the Fishlake

Erest up and lang strete ðare ðat ðurstan seit and so to fareburne

The beginning of the Romsey charter boundary clause does not conform to the usual convention of specifying a named starting point. By comparing the beginning with the end of the bounds, it is clear that the 'street' - 'First up along the street' - does not form part of the boundary. The wording suggests movement and movement implies a starting point, not, in this case, of the actual boundary circuit. It evokes, in my mind, an image of the survey group setting off, presumably from the Abbey, to begin their trek around the boundary. Surely this narrative approach would have been inappropriate in a legal document. What is going on here?

Rather than identifying a starting point by name, the charter is attempting to describe its location. Grundy's solution placed it at the intersection of Middlebridge Street and the Test. This is incorrect as it ignores the instruction to go 'up along the street', clearly inappropriate for the downhill slope to the river. It is also an inconvenient point for the start of the survey. Did the boundary party get into a boat and paddle upstream to the Fairbourne? As I have discussed above, it would not have been necessary to navigate a boundary river or to walk along its bank to establish its course. Its course defined the boundary. The logical point to start the survey would have been further north where the boundary proceeded from the Test.

'Up along the street' takes us north out of Romsey and along Greatbridge Road over Greatbridge causeway. There must have been a bridge or ford to cross the river at the end of the causeway. I have noted a number of examples of the use of bridges and fords as the starts of boundaries. None of these included any information concerning their location. Romsey's charter doesn't refer to a bridge or ford. Why not? The opening clause is describing a point that lay beyond the intersection of the street and the river. It continues 'and so to the Fairbourne'. The starting point was located between the street and the Fairbourne - **ðare ðat ðurstan seit**.

I have previously argued that **scit/scyt** in the Romsey charter means something like 'corners' in the sense of 'turns a right angle'. Alex translated the word as 'shoots'. In his data set the word is usually used with 'out', 'from' or 'to' expressing the relationship between two features. The use of the word in the Romsey charter is unusual in that it refers to only a single feature, the Test. The start of the boundary for Martyr Worthy (S273, 825 Egbert to Winchester Old Minster) uses a verb translated as 'shoots'. Here, as in the case of Romsey, the location of the starting point is described rather referred to by name:

Ærest ðer sæ dic utt scæt æt pambihtæ bætweog lgtunæ 7 Eastunæ

First to where the sea dyke shoots out at the bend between island tun and east tun

It ends without explicitly returning to the starting point:

fordon Ycænan forth on the Itchen

and so to fareburne

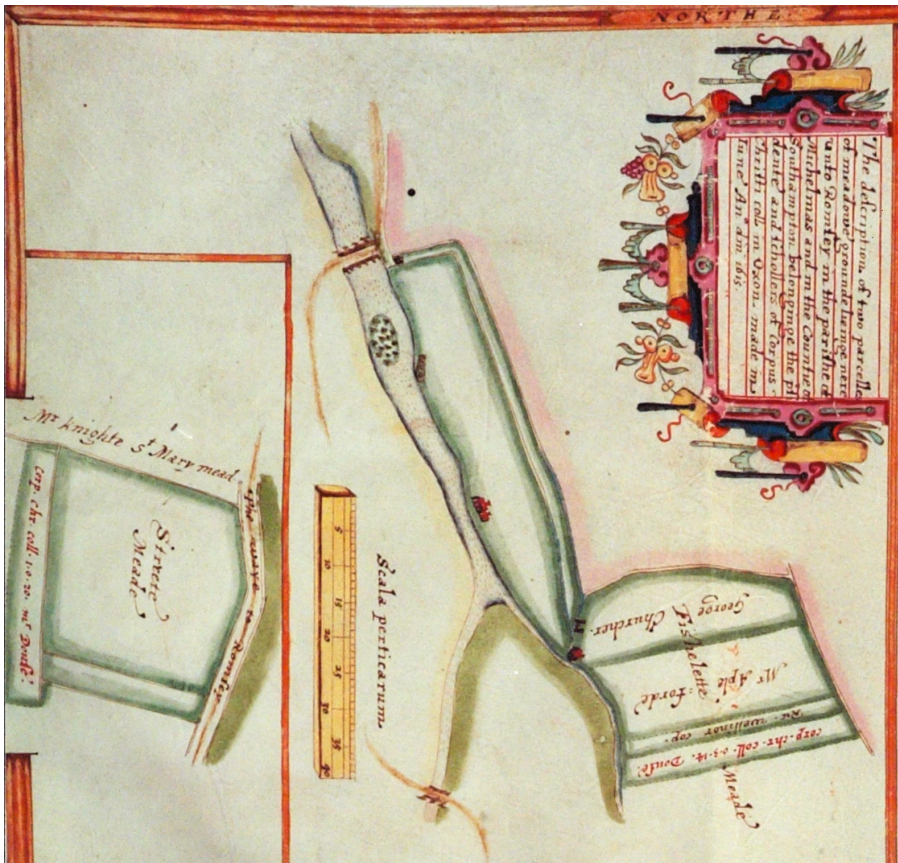
The boundary circuit continues to the Fairbourne. A bourne is a small stream. The Fairbourne is also mentioned in the Michelmersh charter as **feora burnan** and in the Ampfield charter as **fearburnan**. The OE for 'fair' is **faegr**; **feorr** means 'far' or 'distant'. I think the name suggests that the stream marked an early territorial boundary. It rises from springs north of the 'boundary dene', **mearc dene**, mentioned in the charters for Ampfield (S381, 910 x 924) and Chilcomb (S376, 909), which continues the line of the boundary to the east. Was this the boundary of the district or *regio* of Romsge? The natural course of the Fairbourne has been interrupted by the Fishlake and the barge canal. Prior to their construction it would have flowed into the Test to the north of Greatbridge. The confluence of the two watercourses would have made a very suitable starting point for the Romsey charter. Why wasn't it selected?

I think that the only reasonable interpretation of the start and end points of the Romsey charter is that they refer to the Fishlake. There is no other notable feature lying between the street and the Fairbourne. The Test doesn't 'run', 'shoot' or 'spring' in some remarkable way along this part of its course. Simply going up along the street to the Test would have defined a starting point. The crossing at that location could have been referred to by name. There was no need to even mention the street as it does not form part of the boundary. The opening and closing lines of the boundary clause make no sense unless they are describing the Fishlake.

Previous attempts to solve the charter have encountered two problems. The first was the location of the start/end point. As discussed above, a sensible place to start would be at the point where the boundary proceeds from the Test north of Romsey. The survey would continue, moving clockwise, until it reached the Test at the southern edge of the estate. The Test then joined the two points, completing the description of the boundary. Grundy identified Middlebridge Street as the street mentioned in the charter, and Hill Street has also been suggested as a possible candidate. Presumably these were two prominent 'street' place names on local maps. The 1615 Corpus Christi map labels Street Meade adjacent to Greatbridge Road and causeway. The name also appears in earlier documents. This street leads to the logical start point on the Test and fits in with the implied proximity of the Fairbourne.

The second difficulty in solving the charter has been the translation of the verb **seit/seyt** or, correctly, **scit/scyt**. The suggestion that the charter was garbled and that the verb should have applied to the street hints at desperation. The alternative word order still failed to make any sense. I don't think it would be possible to correctly translate this verb without an awareness of the presence of the Fishlake. Even without agreeing a precise translation, it is clear that the Test was doing something. How was the Fishlake perceived by its builders? How could it have been described? Place names arose as commonly used descriptions, not as assigned designations. A terrier of Hall Place Farm of 1665 refers to a meadow in Fish Slade lying between meadows belonging to William Churcher and Corpus Christi. The 1615 Corpus Christi map places this at the northern end of the Fishlake. The terrier refers to it as 'water running to Romsey'. Other early documents containing variations of name Fishlake apply the name to land rather than the watercourse.

Looking at modern references, it is clear that we don't have a suitable word to describe the Fishlake. It is usually referred to as a braid of the Test. This is stretching the definition of the word 'braid' which implies a natural channel. No one would call a canal a braid of a river. What did the Anglo-Saxons call their artificial waterway? Given the usage of this word in other charters, it would be expected that the Test would **scit** to or into something. If the Fishlake had no name or was considered to be part of the Test, how could it have been referred to? The structure containing the water would also be difficult to describe. It wasn't a **dic**, a ditch or dyke, as the water was carried above the level of the ground. Perhaps describe it by function - a canal, a leat, a general water supply for the Abbey, for the town - all of the above? Only a short length of the watercourse formed a part of the boundary. Stating that the Test **scit** near junction of the street with the Test apparently conveyed a sufficiently precise meaning to define the boundary, regardless of our inability to translate the word.



Detail of the 1615 map of properties held by Corpus Christi College in the parish of Michelmersh. The map pre-dates the construction of the leat to Greatbridge mill, so the bridge at Greatbridge crosses only a single channel.

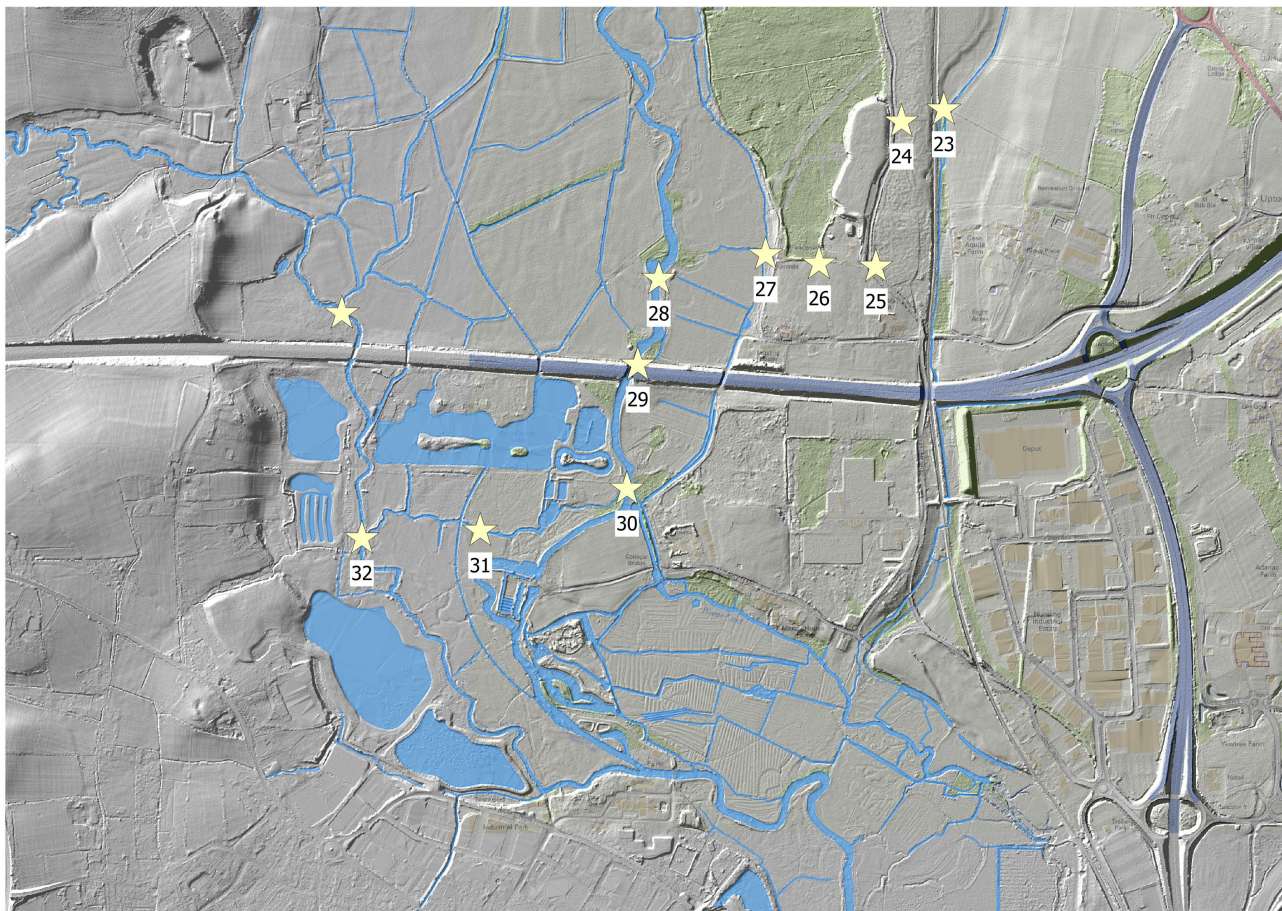
Romsey's Southern Boundary and the Old Test

The boundary circuit continues until it reaches the northern edge of Nursling. Here it follows the boundary described nearly a century earlier in the Nursling charter of 877 (S1277). The two circuits proceed in opposite directions and note different boundary features. This was not simply a case of the two survey parties selecting alternative points to mark the boundary. The differences demonstrate a significant change in the configuration of the watercourses on the Test floodplain between 877 and c. 972.

In the Nursling charter the boundary runs north along the Test to the **mercfrot (mearc fleot)** or 'boundary creek'. It then crosses the floodplain from west to east **anlang flotes**. The word **fleot** means, specifically, a tidal creek. A tidal creek is a small watercourse that changes its flow during the tidal cycle. At low tide it carries fresh water, in this case as a tributary to the Test draining water from the higher ground east of the floodplain. The rising tide would reverse the flow, filling the channel with salt water. It is possible that the channel was filled with a sufficient height of water to be navigable at high tide. At low tide it could have dried to a muddy channel.

There are references to **fleots** in the boundaries of two Devon estates in the database. The **hunburgefleot** at South Hams appears in Alex's translation as 'down to the brook to hunberge creek and there to the sea'. At Dawlish **fleotes** are associated with two rivers: 'First from the mouth of the Teign up along the estuary (**thaes fleotes**)' and, further along the boundary, 'and so along the estuary out to the Exe', then along the Exe via the 'shooting lake' to the 'estuary head (**thaes fleotes heafod**)'. The coastal location of all these features fits with the translation as tidal creek or as an estuary - the tidal zone at the mouth of a river. The word is discussed by Ann Cole in her paper 'fleot: Distribution and Use of this OE Place-Name Element', JEPNS 29, 1997, 79-87. It occurs along the east and south coasts in the names of both waterways and settlements. This association indicates the value of these tidal creeks as access routes between sea and land. The settlements would have served as transshipment points for waterborne goods to be moved inland. Perhaps the presence of a fleot influenced the choice of Nursling as the location for an early monastic community. The site would have been isolated but accessible.

Below is a QGIS map combining LiDAR and surface water with a modern Open Street Map. It shows our solution of the Romsey/Nursling boundary. The numbers refer to sections of the boundary clause in the Romsey charter. We positioned the points along the line of the 1845 parish boundary. Those features lying in the floodplain seem to fit in with the modern topography. Boundary points on the higher ground were more difficult to identify, partly owing to several untranslatable words in the text. We assume that the Nursling boundary described in 877 followed the same course.



Of Wirmesye to bodestan (23)
 fram bodestan suthe andlang lauen (24)
 fram ðe lauen in ðe dich bi ðugen (25)
 ðanne andlang dich (26) in non ðe wiðige (27)
 Of ðan wiðie in an ðe heat (28) andlang heae (29) in ðan dede lake (30)
 Of ðare dedelake to hunesige (31) of hunesige in and ðan alde tersten (32)
 andlang ðar ealde terste ond ðe hit comeð in ðare streit ðare wurstan seyt

The Nursling charter boundary runs north along the Test to the boundary **fleot**, then east along the creek across the floodplain to Bodding Mead and then to **boddanstan**. Two points link this section of the boundary with the Romsey charter described a century later - the Test/Old Test and **boddanstan/bodestan**. We located this feature at the edge of a field named Badstones on the 1845 tithe map. It has been suggested that this charter marker was a boundary stone on land belonging to someone named Bodda. (Was Bodding Mead the meadow of Bodda's people?) Why would the personal reference continue for a century when the ownership must have changed? Why would a field be named after its boundary stone? The stone itself seems to be significant. Below are translations for **boda** from Old English Translator. Could the stone have served the same function as a preaching cross, marking the location where people could gather to hear the words of an apostle or missionary? I have looked through the tithe schedules for our study area. There is one other field called Badstone. It is in Michelmersh adjacent to a nodal point where three roads meet, a particularly accessible location. There are two references in Alex's data to rood stones as boundary markers. Is this a parallel to our **bodestan**?

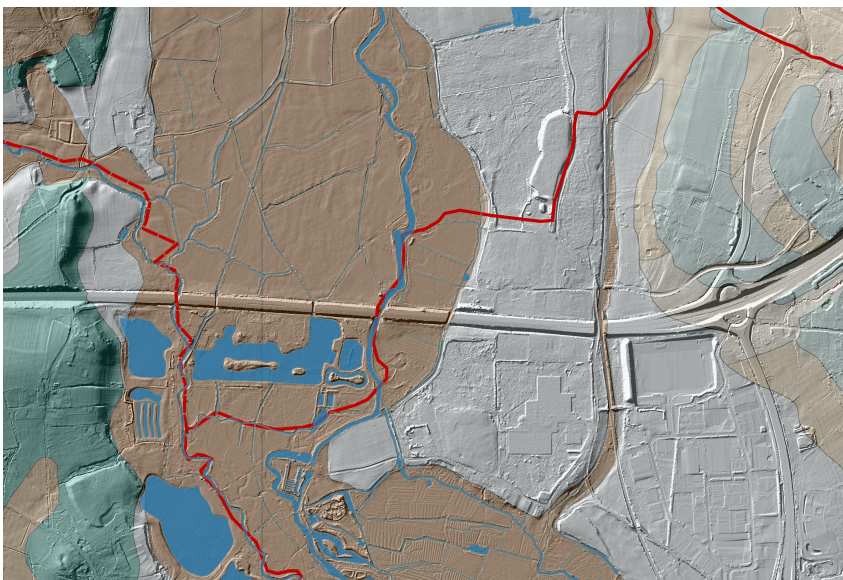
bod strong a-stem A command ; mandate ; precept ; order; bidding		
bod	Singular	Plural
Nominative	(the/that se) bod	(the/those þá) bodu
Accusative	(the/that þone) bod	(the/those þá) bodu
Genitive	(the/that þæs) bodes	(the/those þára) boda
Dative	(the/that þæm) bode	(the/those þæm) bodum

boda weak 1. messenger ; envoy ; herald ; apostle ; angel 2. prophet		
boda	Singular	Plural
Nominative	(the/that se) boda	(the/those þá) bodan
Accusative	(the/that þone) bodan	(the/those þá) bodan
Genitive	(the/that þæs) bodan	(the/those þára) bodena
Dative	(the/that þæm) bodan	(the/those þæm) bodum

Old Test, New Test?

The Test of the Nursling charter was clearly flowing along the western side of the floodplain. This channel was referred to in the Romsey charter as the Old Test. The adjective must have been applied to differentiate this channel from an alternative Test. The suggestion has been made that the Test was flowing in two channels, one on the western and one on the eastern side of the floodplain, when the Nursling charter was composed. At some time during the following century the flow pattern altered, decreasing the volume of water in the western channel. This naturally occurring shift led to the now reduced western channel being referred to as the Old Test. I disagree with this interpretation. The changes evident along the Nursling/Romsey boundary were the result of artificial water management.

A lot of time and effort has been expended on trying to trace the course of the Old Test. As we observed on our walk across the valley from Moorcourt, a considerable amount of water management has taken place in the floodplain. This has been undertaken to improve the land by the construction of a network of drainage ditches. It has also controlled the water as a resource. We found a mill leat leading to the foundations of an abandoned mill. The presence of a fisherman's hut highlighted the value of the river as a source of food. A thousand years of artificial management along with natural flooding and alluviation are likely to have erased the 10th century channel of the Old Test. What we should be looking for is the other Test.

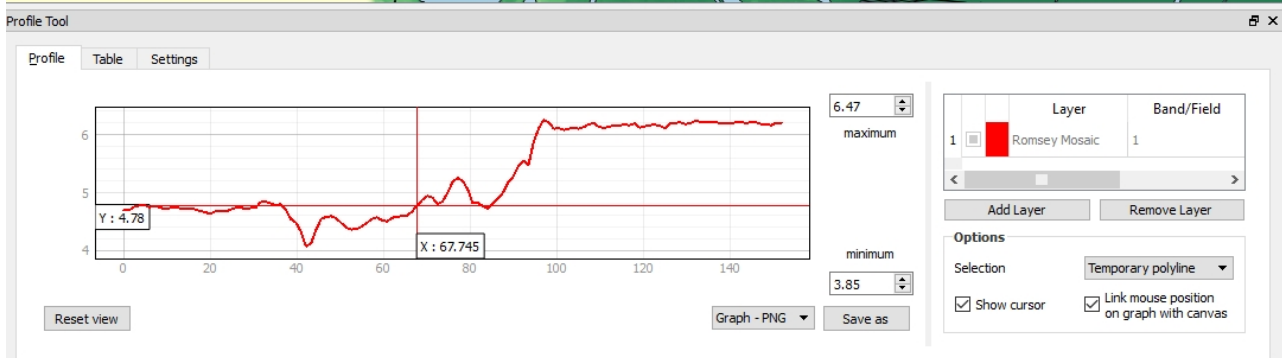
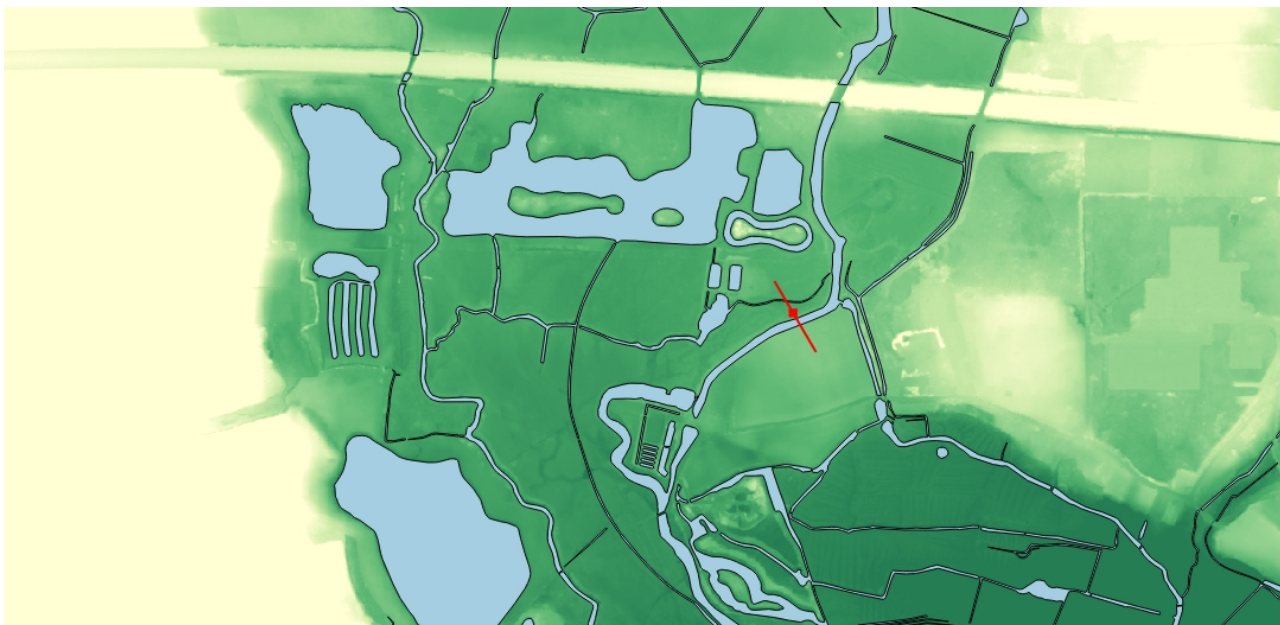


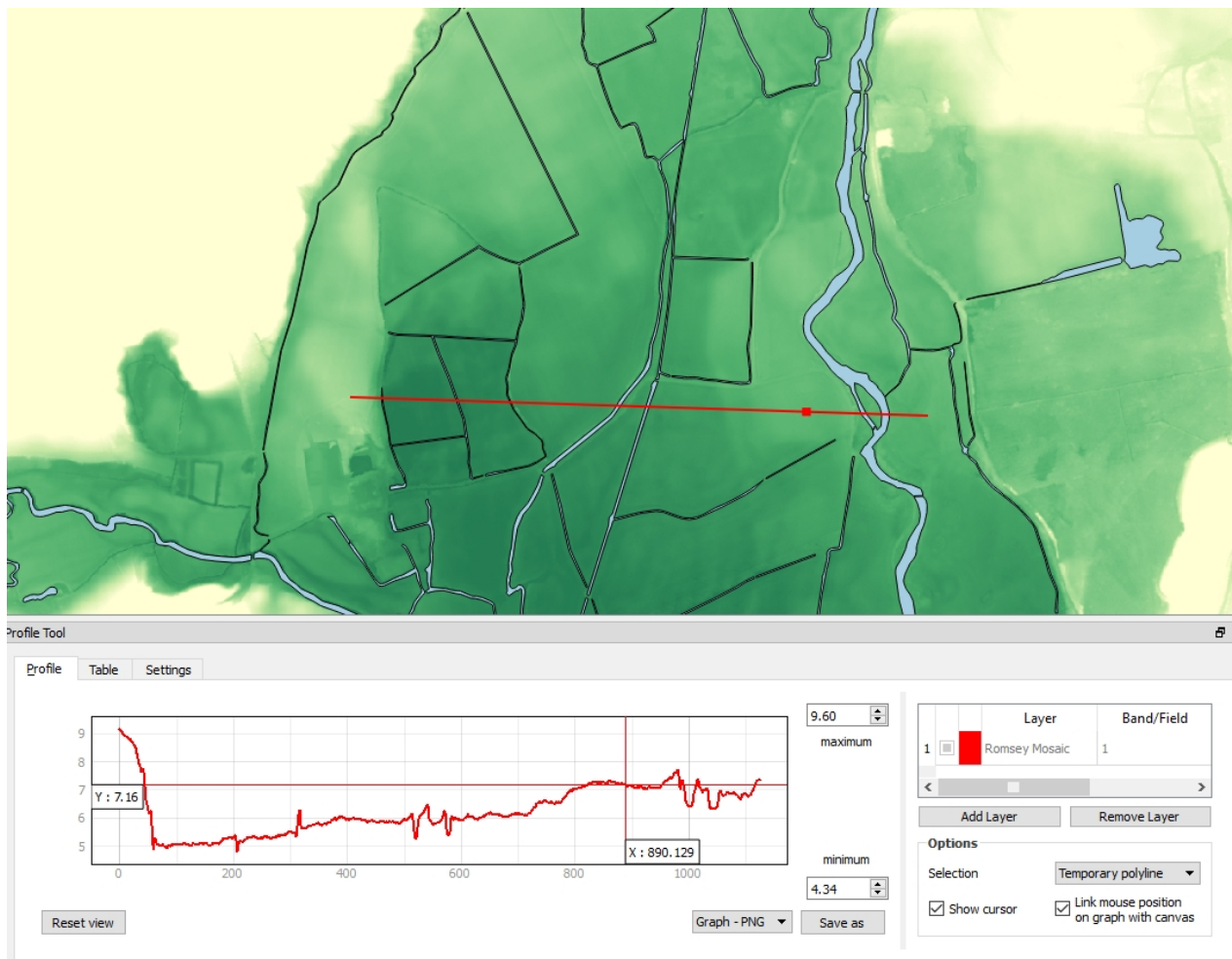
This map combines LiDAR with the surface geology. The alluvium of the floodplain is brown and the adjacent river terrace is grey. The red line marks the approximate position of the 1845 parish boundary. The main channel of the Test is on the eastern side of the floodplain.

In the Nursling charter the boundary crossed the floodplain along a **fleot** or tidal creek. I don't think that a channel of the Test would have been described as a tidal creek. The section of the boundary that followed the current Test in the Romsey charter was termed the **heat/heae**. I have not been able to find this word in an Old English dictionary. I think the correct word would have been **heaf** meaning water. If this had been a long established channel of the Test, why didn't it have a name? The name **Terstan** was a Celtic/British survival in use for a millennium or more when the charters were written. Why would part of the Test be referred to as 'the water'?

Romsey's boundary followed the **heae** as far as the 'dead lake'. This is the point where the tidal creek changed direction to flow west parallel to a projecting spur of the river terrace. 'Dead lake' describes a channel of stagnant water cut off from its natural supply of fresh water. The **heae** did not follow the course of the earlier creek but continued to flow south. It presumably continued along the course of the current Test, to the edge of the terrace and around the tip of the spur.

Below is a colour-shaded relief map. The pale yellow represents high ground; the green deepens in colour with depth. The red line shows the position of a profile extending from the floodplain, across the 'dead lake', across the Test and onto the river terrace. The red dot corresponds with the vertical line on the profile. The channel of the Test is at a higher level than the channel to the north. The river has been artificially deflected from its natural course to flow along the edge of the terrace spur. Why? The mid 19th century tithe map shows a mill just west of the spur. The most valuable mill recorded in our area in Domesday Book was at Nursling. It seems reasonable to suggest that the water management evident here was undertaken to provide a source of water power for a mill. Where did the water come from?

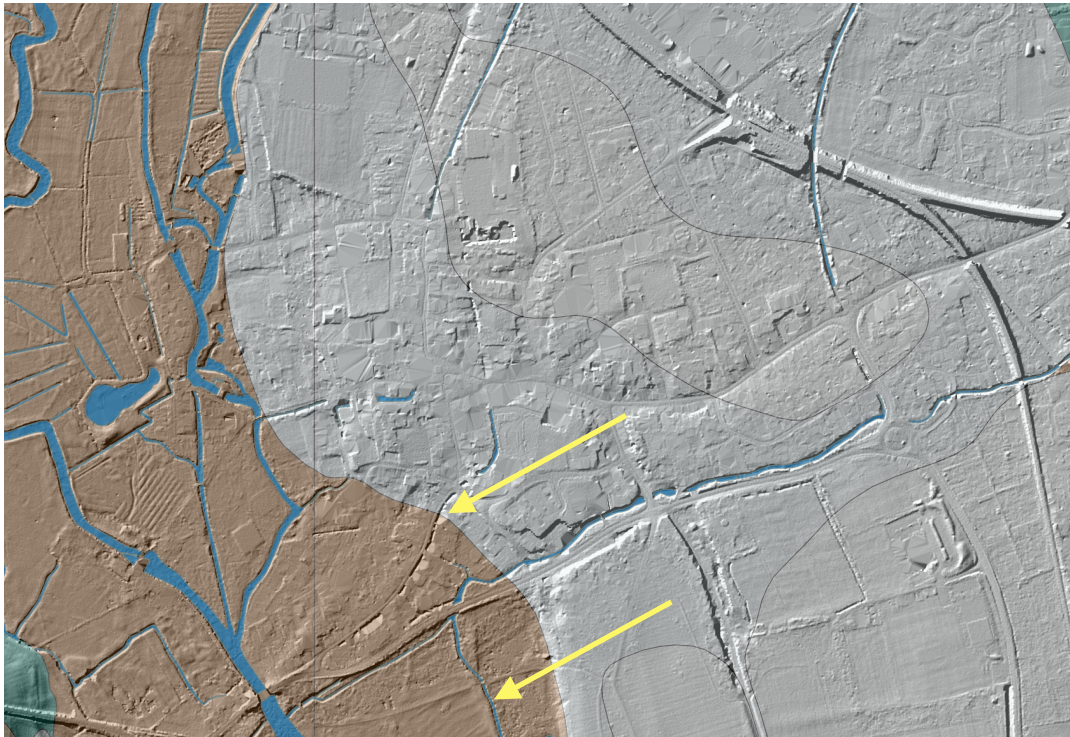




The second relief map shows the topography farther up the Test. The Blackwater flows into the valley from the west. The profile of the floodplain starts north of Moorcourt and extends across the Test. Both the shading and the profile show that the Test is flowing through relatively high ground on the eastern side of the floodplain. The Old Test would have been farther west on the lower ground. Why is the current Test on the east side of the floodplain?

The Romsey charter boundary continues from the dead lake, to an island (**hundesige**) and then 'into the Old Test'. It proceeds 'along the Old Test until it comes to the street where the Test **scyts**'. This completes the boundary circuit, returning to the starting point. Previous attempts to solve the charter have suggested that the words are in the wrong order or that a point has been left out along the western boundary. I would prefer to take the novel approach of taking the description at its word. What this is saying is that the junction, or more correctly dis-junction, of the Old Test and the Test is at the point where the Test **scyt**. The Test is not referred to as the Old Test upstream from here. The Michelmersh charter of 985, some 15 years after the Romsey charter, starts and ends on the Test. Does the Fishlake mark the start of the 'other' or 'new' (as opposed to Old) Test?

It would not be surprising if the Fishlake was thought of and spoken of as part of the Test. It is still commonly, and incorrectly, described as a braid of the Test. An early 19th century document says that the Fishlake carried a third of the water of the Test into Romsey. Some of that water would have been diverted into the Abbey. The excavation at Creatures Pet Shop, formerly in the Market Place west of the Town Hall, found a water channel in line with the west branch of the Fishlake. Water flowing through here and water in the east branch would have run off the edge of the terrace into the Tadburn and then onto the east side of the floodplain. The arrows on the map below show its probable route. Watercourses in this area would have been rerouted with the development of Middlebridge Street in the 13th century, which was built out over the floodplain, probably on artificially raised ground.

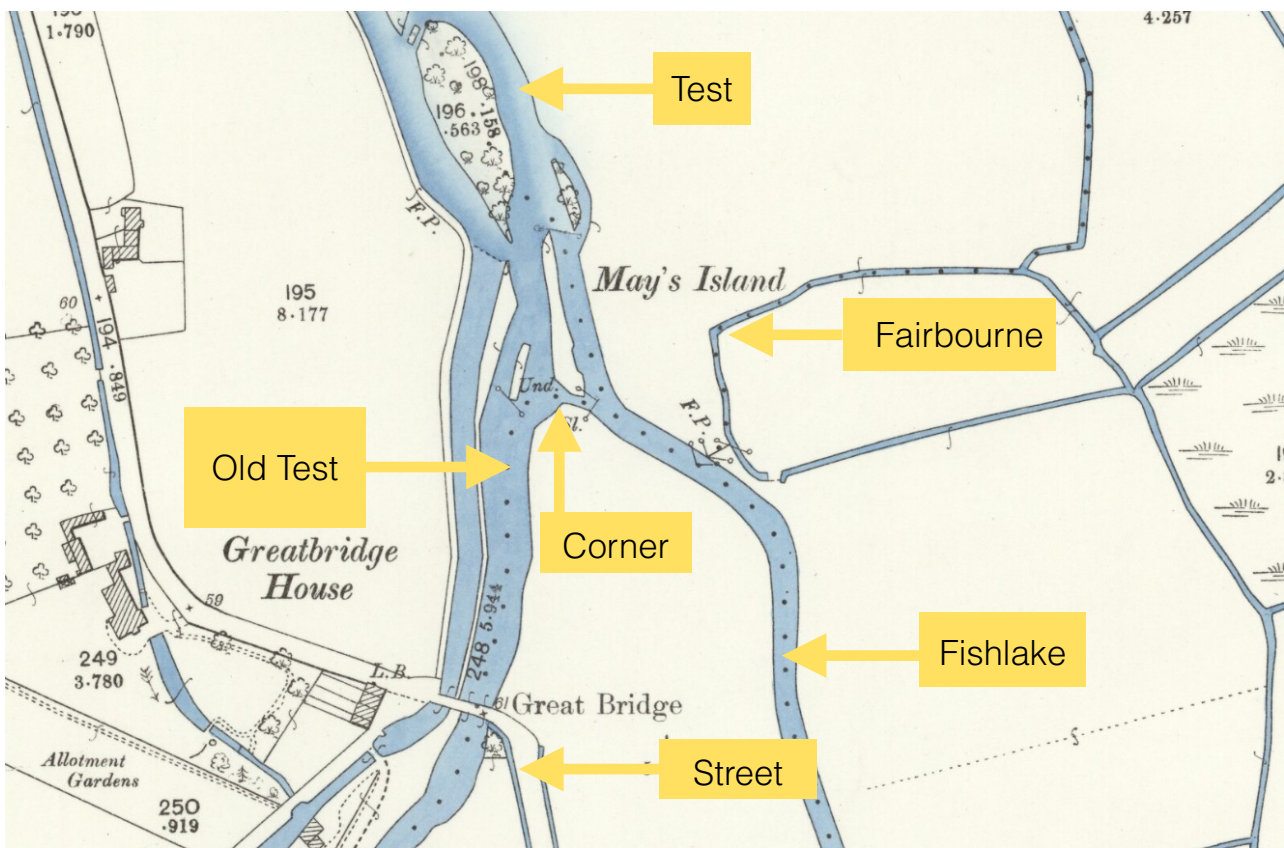


I don't think that the water discharged from the Fishlake would have naturally continued along the east side of the floodplain to Nursling. There must have been additional engineering work involved. Its course would have incorporated natural drainage channels eroded by rainwater near the edge of the terrace. Water could have been dammed and then directed along a cutting in the desired direction. Harnessing the erosive force of the water would have reduced the amount of manual labour required. The creation of a new channel of the Test was a far easier project than the construction of the Fishlake. It would have made the Test accessible to farms and settlements on the river terrace.

The Old Test wasn't 'old' because it had changed, although it was carrying less water. It was old in the sense of original. It followed the course of what must have been an ancient boundary, a major geographical feature that retained its name throughout periods of significant social, cultural and political upheavals. In describing the Romsey boundary in c. 972, the authorities attesting it avoided referring to any other channel as the Test. The estate land needed to be protected from potential disputes. The necessity of adding the adjective 'old' strongly suggests that 'the water' and possibly the Fishlake were popularly referred to as the Test. It had to be clear which Test formed the boundary - the west rather than the east channel.

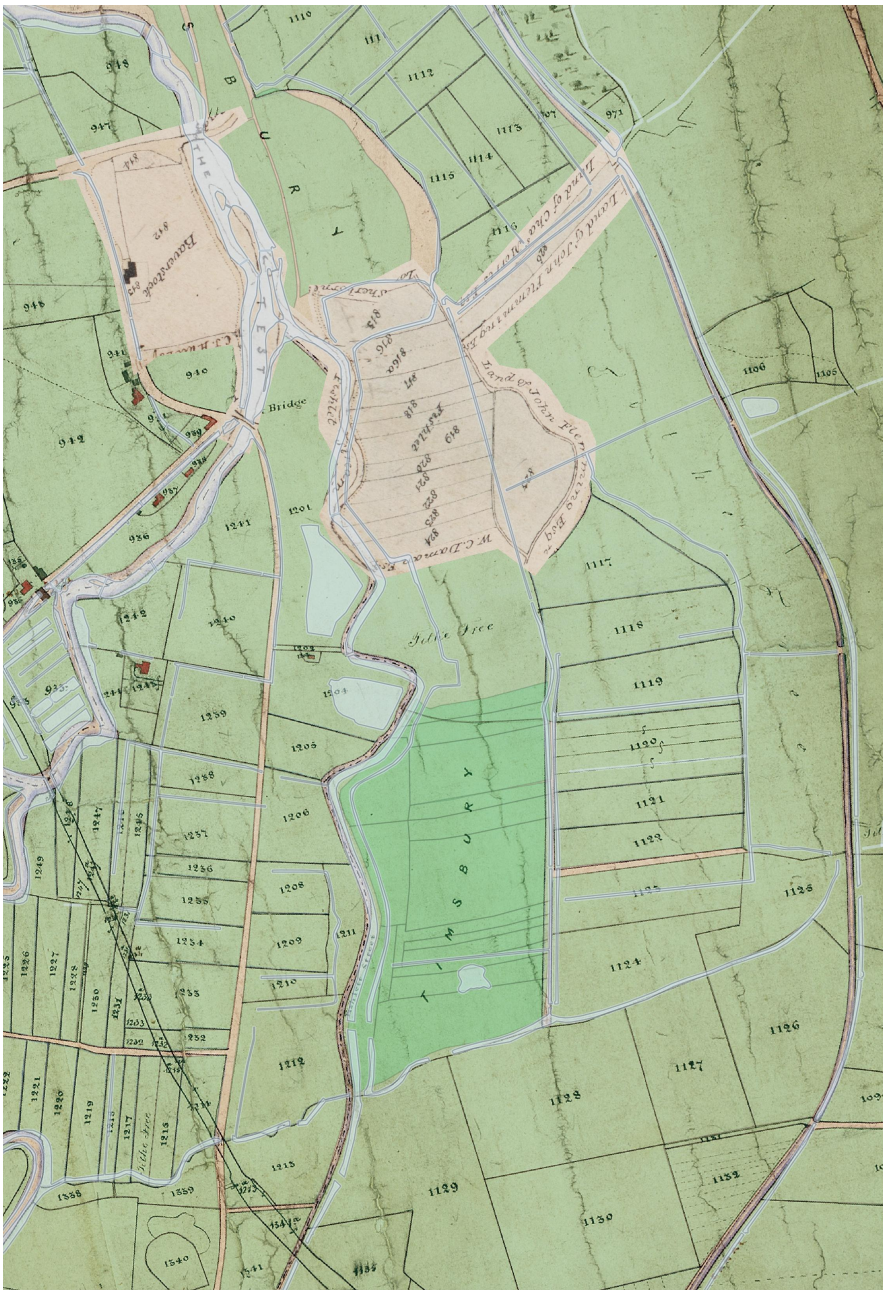
A Major Anglo-Saxon Engineering Project

The argument has been made that the Fishlake was built after 972, possibly even post-Conquest, because such an impressive engineering project would have been mentioned in the charter. As I have discussed above, I think it does appear in the charter, albeit obscurely. The boundary, marked by a dotted line on the map below, follows the Fishlake for only a short distance from its source. The scale of the work involved in its construction would have been blindingly obvious to the party making their way 'up along the street' alongside it, particularly if it had been a sunny day with the light reflecting off the chalk retaining banks. Describing this in the boundary clause would have been inappropriate. Having said that, a major engineering project that doesn't form part of the boundary is mentioned prominently in the charter - the street.



I think that the street and the Fishlake were built together as parts of a complex project in landscape management. The description of a routeway as a street implies that it had a paved or prepared surface. It would not have been built directly on the floodplain but would have been carried across the floodplain on a causeway, a **bridge** in Old English. It would have been made from material that had been quarried nearby. The Fishlake banks must have been built of chalk and clay to be impervious to water. The causeway would not have had this requirement. It would have been made from gravel - it would have been a **groot bridge**. Computer modelling of past flood events by the Environment Agency concluded that flooding on Greatbridge Road was the result of water overflowing the banks of the Fishlake. When the Fishlake was in operation the water level would have been controlled, so overflow flooding would not have been a problem. The banks of the Fishlake are higher than the causeway. They would hold back any flood water to the east in Fishlake Meadows. The street would have been a year-round route leading north out of Romsey for travellers heading west along Old Salisbury Lane in the direction of Old Sarum and Wilton or continuing north along the Test valley towards Timsbury, Michelmersh and King's Somborne.

The engineering work provided a water supply for Romsey and its Abbey and a road to the north. Managing the Test would also have allowed the development of the meadow land west of the causeway and east of the Fishlake, now Fishlake Meadows nature reserve. The map below shows the Romsey tithe map with the detached parts of the Michelmersh and Timsbury tithe maps superimposed. Both these parishes border the Test and would have had access to riverside grassland. I think that detached parts of these parishes represent the allocation of this valuable resource at an early date, before the floodplain further north had been developed. It might be significant that the large field bordering the Test at the southern extension of Timsbury parish is called Cobb's Marsh.



The base map is the Romsey 12 tithe map. Detached land belonging to Michelmersh is pink and that belonging to Timsbury is green. The surface water is modern.

If the Fishlake does appear in the Romsey charter, when was it likely to have been built? I think it was no more than a couple of decades old when the charter bounds were written. There are no place names referred to for the crossing point at the end of the street or the Fishlake itself. The starting point was at a difficult to describe location. I think it was selected because it represented a significant alteration in an earlier, possibly ancient, boundary configuration that had included the confluence of the Test and the Fairbourne. With the construction of the Fishlake, the Fairbourne was rerouted as part of the water management scheme for the meadow land.

There is evidence for an increase in urbanisation and infrastructure development from the mid 10th century onwards. Water management projects were underway at other monastic sites. The expertise that would have been required to build the Fishlake was available at that time. I think that a date around 950 or 960 for the construction of the Fishlake fits in with current thinking on developments taking place in late Anglo-Saxon England. Romsey was important in the Anglo-Saxon period - as the centre of an iron smelting industry, as a minster and Abbey, and, most particularly, for its mastery of water management. Romsey has largely been missed out from archaeological discussions. We need to ensure that it gets the recognition it deserves.