MEADOWS IRONWORK

Iron work on floated water meadows is almost invariably confined to the hatch controls - that is the various types of device used to raise or lower the wooden paddles. There are exceptions, sometimes the whole hatch structure is of wrought or cast iron. Easily seen examples are at Stratford sub Castle on the River Avon [SU128330] (1) and on the River Bourne at the ford connecting East and West Gomeldon [181369] (2). Aqueducts are not unusual but we probably trump most other systems in the chalk valleys with a surviving iron example.

Our meadows are, however, woefully bereft of iron on the hatches. Of the eighteen around the western end, formerly all releasing water from the river, thirteen have been restored during the lifetime of the Trust and five, heavily silted and virtually invisible, remain abandoned. Of those restored, ten have modern welded steel mechanisms. These ten were also heavily silted in the late 1970s when I first mapped them in a somewhat impressionistic way (3). The conservation purist would of course have hoped that any buried iron coming to light was re-used, and failing that, new wrought or cast ironwork could be manufactured.

However early iron work does survive, in some cases only in part on S7/7a, S14, S18, S9a and notably the double hatch, S9, controlling flow to the main carriage behind Rose Cottage and then to the eastern meadows. The two mechanisms here are certainly among the most interesting pieces of industrial archaeology on the meadows. They appear to be standard iron foundry rack and pinion castings. The vertical pinion has guide cheeks; the rack cog and ratchet wheels are secured on a square section spindle with flat wedges. All the parts are attached to the wooden frame with modern steel bolts.

Who made them and when? A sharp eyed visitor last summer spotted an indecipherable maker's mark and with some presence of mind took a paper rubbing. Later Charles Villiers kindly took photographs. The illustration show, in sequence:

A) complete hatch, closed, with the two paddles lowered. The maker's mark is on the near left hand corner of the roller plate located on the outside retaining timber beam.
B) close-up of the roller plate
C) the impressed name

Depending on how these pictures reproduce, you may now be able to see that the iron foundry was TASKER from their Waterloo Ironworks, in existence at Abbots Ann, near Andover from at least 1820 to 1937. So much for 'who' but 'when' is more difficult. Iron machinery undoubtedly outlasts wooden hatches, possibly several times. A sensible guess might be late 19th or very early 20th century.

A

B

C

D

Our famous iron aqueduct is equally difficult to date with any great precision but we do know where it was prefabricated before the sections were bolted together on site. When erected there was an oval plaque on its west side - not visible therefore from Town Path and not there now. The trough is fourteen feet long with a width and height of 32 inches. The small boy in the picture (D) was four years old when it was taken in 1981. He was there as a measuring device but more significantly the plaque was there as well and I was able to record the detail for the SWIAS monograph (4)

J Armitage
Maker - Fisherton Ironworks - Salisbury

This firm is not listed in Pigot's 1842 Directory (5) which probably means that the aqueduct was made by a new business some years later. This in turn fits with the mid 19th century changes being made to the western meadows by Lord Pembroke.

Notes

1 Cowan M Wiltshire Water Meadows Hobnob 2005 pp 75, 114 and figure 3.1d

2 ibid pp 78/79

3 ibid p 44 from Cowan M Floated water meadows in the Salisbury area South Wiltshire Industrial Archaeology Society monograph 1982

4 ibid, text in un-numbered pages and front cover drawing by John Chandler

5 Rogers KH and Chandler JH (eds) Early trade directories of Wiltshire Wiltshire Record Society 47, 1992

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