

Soe and Ann put together a planting scheme using mainly plants, shrubs and young trees which grow locally. In the spring, literally knee-deep in mud, they planted the saplings and then sowed grass and wild flower seed around the perimeter. As soon as the sun came out, the verges turned green and the new plants produced healthy shoots. Children from Shiplake Primary School enjoyed planting primroses and bluebells and followed the story of the pond restoration as a project at school.

Living up to its old name however, the pond water remained resolutely murky. Several people living locally have brought oxygenating weeds but clearing the water could yet take a long time. As the pond gradually establishes its own eco-system the water should clear, although its levels will always be dependent on the weather and will vary with the seasons.

Border logs were placed around the pond, marking its contours and the old metal grille of Keep's Well was restored and painted. The information board telling the pond's history was written and designed by Lis.

Throughout all the stages of the project, local photographer Bill Pound took pictures of the work, which can be found on the website [www.photosland.com](http://www.photosland.com). Log in with [billpound@lineone.net](mailto:billpound@lineone.net), use the password 'green' and you can see all the pictures.

Now the hard work is over and the Green Pond project team looks forward to seeing the pond and its surroundings mature over time. We all hope that villagers and visitors will enjoy it for years to come.



## The story of Green Pond

### A Shiplake Parish Council project

MOST people who live locally will have seen the restoration work that has taken place at Green Pond beside Keep's Lane in Binfield Heath. Many who pass by regularly will have watched its gradual transformation during the first half of this year from an overgrown cluster of trees to a pond set in grass and young plants, open for the first time in decades to air and sky.

The decision to restore Green Pond, with the permission of the Makower family, who own it, was taken by Shiplake Parish Council just over a year ago – before the parish changeover to Binfield Heath. Many people contributed to the project and the council set up a working party led by Roger Head, whose members included Ann Law, Lis Ransom, Duncan Ritchie, Sue Summerland and Brian Talfourd Cook.

The working party set out late last year to find both volunteers and funds for the project. Mrs Beryl Hunt from the Chiltern Society took a keen interest in the pond restoration, having been involved in many similar projects. Following her advice, the council successfully contacted the Countryside Agency for a Local Heritage Initiative grant, which was matched by Shiplake Parish Council and enabled the team to contract out the heavier tasks.

Several trees were cut down and others trimmed back and logs and branches were placed at the back of the pond as a habitat for small animals and insects. After testing the base of the exposed pond area for soundness, contractors established that the clay bottom was still intact and would hold water. Tons of mud and debris were carefully excavated by digger and removed from the site. Engineers from Oxfordshire County Council checked that the old drainage pipes from the roadside were still intact and would run water into the pond and that the overflow outlet pipe was clear. Then everyone just had to wait for the rains!

*Continued on back*

**G**reen Pond is one of several old ponds in this village and the first to be restored. In their hey-day these ponds were less an attractive feature than a practical source of water.

They were used by local farmers to water their stock and by travellers and tradespeople in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to feed both horses and traction engines. Bridgewater's drags carrying beer to the local public houses would stop to refresh their animals on routes from the Newby Brewery to the New Inn, the White Hart, the Buttle and Glass and other nearby inns. At harvest time traction engines used to go from farm to farm to cut the crops, refilling with water at the village pond.

There are not many historical references to Green Pond, although its name may suggest the condition and colour of much of its past life! It was down on plans for the sale of Whitwood in the late nineteenth century, its edges coming right up to the main road and to nearby Kings Lane.

When Shipkale Row was the main road up from the Thames at Shipkale to the higher ground and winter pastures in Shipfield Heath and beyond towards Smeeth Common, the pond would have been used for watering the animals as they were herded along. At one time a working farm pond for the Whitwood estate, it must have fallen into disuse during the twentieth century. The pond silted up and eventually dried out, except in the wettest weather. Overgrown with trees and undergrowth by the turn of the millennium, few people remembered it.

#### Restoration

Green Pond and its surrounding land being in the Babover Trust and with their permission, Shipkale Parish Council, together with the Children's Society set about restoring it in December 2002. They were backed by the Cranborne Agency through a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. First, the trees which had grown up inside it were cleared away, then around it cut back and the pond emptied of silt down to the clay bottom. Old rain water drains were opened up and the surface of Kings Lane raised to allow water to flow to the pond once again. A period of prolonged heavy rain quickly filled it and in spring 2003 volunteers helped to plant out the banks with indigenous flowers and shrubs, creating a natural haven for wildlife.

#### A community project

Volunteers were invited to join in the restoration work, once the tree cutting and excavation work had been completed. Local people helped to stock the banks with trees and plants and children from Shipkale Primary School planted masses of primroses around the pond's edges.

## The story of Green Pond Binfield Heath

#### Flora and fauna

Flora and trees natural to South Oxfordshire are encouraged to grow round this pond. Among the young trees are Mountain Ash, Weeping Birch, Wild Cherry, and Ash. The banks are planted with homophonic, cornus, privet, roses, and dogfish. Bulrushes rise from the

water's edge and hardy English ferns and Warbells grow under the trees. The banks were sown with slow growing grass. As the waters, naturalists expect the pond area to be inhabited by ducks, frogs, newts, toads, eels and insects such as dragonflies and waterbeetles. It might even see regular visitors.

#### Kings Lane

Propagated today by walkers and riders, Kings Lane runs from Shipkale Row across the fields to Open Hill - and is reputedly haunted. In 1835, Whitwood's owner, the Hon. Charles Stowe, brother of Lord Carnarvon of Dover House, was badly injured by a falling tree on his estate. His coachman was dispatched with horse and carriage to fetch a doctor from Reading - and set out at speed down Kings Lane. The unlucky Stowe, however, soon died and a gardener was sent out to bring back the coachman -

who was by this time galloping back along the narrow, muddy Kings Lane. The tree was head-on - and the coachman died in the collision, and it is said that the sound of galloping hooves still haunts the lane at night.

#### Kings Well

Kings Well was established by Admiral Inishowen, the owner of Whitwood from 1805-1879, as a local water supply which also served his vegetable garden behind the adjacent high brick and flint wall. The owners of Whitwood had to pay an annual title of 125d (10p) to Shipkale Parochial Church Council

for the right to have the well. The area comprising the pond and adjoining land, including the well, was formerly known as Shipkale Common.

Kings Well was located in an unusual domed brick edifice with a small iron grille. In the early 1980s a farmer's tractor accidentally damaged it when manoeuvring a tractor and it had to be rebuilt. There are a number of wells in this village, several in the gardens of older houses, which once served households with a regular supply. Some Victorian house wells were round and constructed in brick, to trap rain water. Others tapped into one of the natural Chiltern springs.

An artist's impression of the pond shortly after restoration, before planting, April 2003



#### Geology

These ponds were probably created from naturally occurring shallow depressions, which collected rain water in clay bottomed hollows and were fed by springs or drainage from higher levels. Binfield Heath sits on the flooding clay beds, where parts of the hills are overlaid in chalk or gravel. Rain soaks through the top layers and is held by the clay below. Where clay lies, the water table is close to the surface and in the shallow hollows centuries ago people would have 'puddled' the wet clay bottom to form the shape and depth they wanted to create a useful pond. Silt which collected in the bottom of the pond would have been regularly dug out and used to form the banks.

#### Other ponds in the village

Binfield Heath still has several ponds. The biggest is Barnes Pond beside Syppard Cottage. Once there was a big pond outside New Inn Cottage. It was filled in and the road established in the last century. Ponds hidden in all but the most obvious are still to be found around the village.



Kings Well, built as a village water supply in the late 1800s