

ORIGINS OF PENN STREET

The Penna - Old English *penn*, means 'enclosure or pen'. The Anglo-Saxon citizens of London used Wycombe Heath, of which Penn Wood was a part, as a hunting chase. It seems that Penn (& Common) Wood was the enclosure or pen used to safeguard their deer in order to hunt them both there and on the wider heath. Because it was unique, it was called 'The Penn' and gave its name to the later parish. Norman scribes translated the name as La Penne or La Penna, because Saxons pronounced the second 'n' as a separate syllable. Thus a Saxon resident would have said he came from The Pen-na. This form lasted for more than three hundred years after the Norman Conquest in 1066.

straet. The earliest known reference to the name Penn Street is in the parish register for 1592 and the oldest house is about a century earlier, but the name is much older than that. Old English *straet* was the name the Saxons gave to a road used by their Roman predecessors. There was a Roman villa and iron smelting and smithing industry near Shardeloes, about 1 1/2 miles north of Penn Street and the route connecting them with a main Roman road just south of Beaconsfield is marked to this day by the surviving road names of Penn Street and Clay Street and the forgotten name of Old Street (part of the B474 at Knotty Green).

Thus Penn Street was once understood to mean the former Roman road by the enclosed part of the Heath.

Manor House. The present hamlet probably first grew up on the heath outside the gates to service the new manor house, now Penn House, after the de la Penne family moved from their first cramped manor house at Penbury, near Penn Church in c.1400.

The church was built in 1849 by Earl Howe, apparently at the suggestion of Queen Adelaide, together with a school (since rebuilt) and a vicarage, all designed by Benjamin Ferrey.

Population. A century ago, there were 35 households, almost all in small cottages and nearly half working directly for Earl Howe. They included a postmaster, policeman, baker and coal merchant.

1923/38 O.S. MAP SHOWING LINE OF PONDS AND COMMON



Colour Code:

Green overall - shows registered common

Green perimeter - land owned by Penn Parish Council

Brown - former common, now private land

There is a separate leaflet and information board for each of the three ponds, which are linked by a mile-long belt of nearly continuous common land. They are the product of a Penn Parish Council project largely funded by a Local Heritage Initiative grant.

Useful references:

Penn Street Conservation Area, Chiltern District Council (1992)
'Wycombe Heath and its 'charter', by John Chenevix Trench and Miles Green, *Records of Bucks*, Vol. 36 (1994), pp.144-59, in public libraries.

The History of Penn Wood, Miles Green (1995)

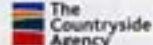
Penn Pond Survey, Christopher Damant (2001)

Miles Green, March 2004

Penn Parish Council

Typeset by Bill Bundy - Penn Support Services


Local Heritage initiative



PENN STREET

POND & COMMON



The Pond in 1914 when the water came right up to the road. The water level in the pond varies greatly with the season. (Postcard from Colin Seabright)

Aquatic plants include rigid hornwort, curly water-thyme, spiked water-milfoil, water-lily species and broad-leaved pondweed. Highly invasive New Zealand pygmyweed has been very hard to eradicate.

Emergent vegetation includes water plantain, marsh marigold, yellow iris, galingale, jointed rush, soft rush, water mint, water forget-me-not, reed canary-grass, greater spearwort and brooklime.

The pond margins include a large beech and oak, areas of open, species rich coarse grass, bramble, Yorkshire fog, cocksfoot, timothy, smooth meadow grass, rosebay willow herb, water mint, yarrow, knapweed, tufted vetch, meadow vetchling and greater birdsfoot trefoil.

Dragonflies (common darter and southern hawkler) and damselflies (blue-tailed & azure blue) can be seen and there is a 1976 record of a great crested newt.

FUNGI ON THE COMMON

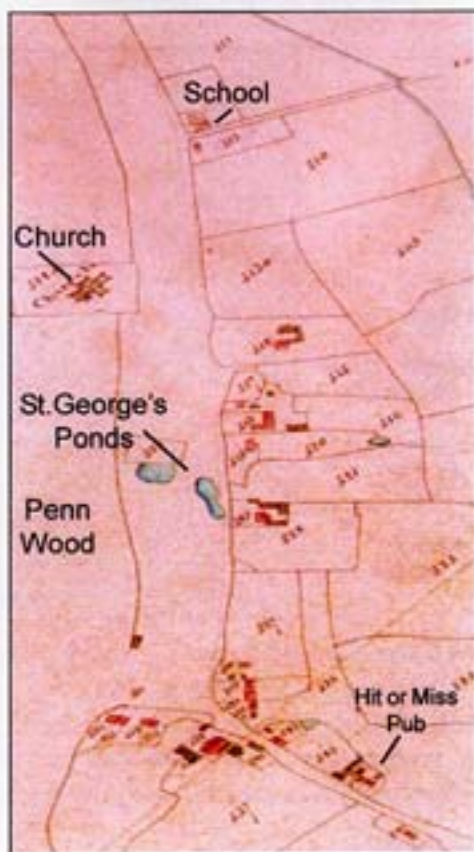


St George's mushroom

St George's Pond - There were two ponds on what is now Penn Street Common and one or both were called St George's, named after an edible spring mushroom called *Calocybe gambosa*. Its old name was *Agaricus georgii*, and it still appears by the pond around St George's Day on 23 April. The name of the mushroom first appears in print in 1601, but the pond name could date back as far as 1222, when 23 April was made St George's feast day by the Church. He became the patron saint of England in the 14th C.

This whole stretch of common, including the cricket ground, has been recognised to be of special interest for another group of mushrooms called waxcaps. 17 different species of these attractive, brightly coloured fungi have so far been recorded here. The best time to see them is in early November, when they can, in a good warm and damp season, pop up like smarties sprinkled over the grass. Our grass-cutting regime takes account of them by avoiding chemicals, restricting cuts and removing grass cuttings

PENN INCLOSURE MAP B, 1855



The Penn Inclosure Award, in 1855, allotted almost the whole of Penn Wood including the present common to Earl Howe as private property, but the common was exchanged for other land the following year and so stayed open to the public.

A Statute, in 1285, required that a 200 foot wide (i.e. a bowshot) strip of land was kept clear of trees between a highway and woodland, in order to remove any cover for highwaymen, who were then a serious problem. There is just such an open strip, roughly 200 feet wide, running all the way down, from the common to the main Wycombe-Amersham road.

AN ARMY CAMP AND CRICKET ON THE COMMON



Army Nissen huts on the common, c.1950
(Photo from Richard Hearne)

Army camp

Penn Wood was already a General Training Area for the army when the 4 ¼ acre common was requisitioned by the Government in March 1943 for military use and some 2 ½ acres of it were used for an army camp, known as Penn Wood Camp, with a cookhouse, huts and roads. There was a mass of barbed wire over the rest of the common and two ponds. There were still 100 men and 20 families there in 1948. The common was de-requisitioned in 1951, but it was 1953 before the common was restored. Several residents wanted the pond filled in at that time since it no longer served any useful purpose. This was a widespread view, from the 1920s onwards, as cars gradually replaced horses in every day use, but the pond was relieved by an 80-signature petition.

Cricket

The Penn Street Cricket Club was founded in 1906 and played on the common, but there is an entry in Penn Parish Council's minutes of 1895 giving permission for the Cricket Club to level their pitch. The common was so uneven, including a 15 foot deep dell and still used for grazing horses, that a new batsman was allowed a 'look at' ball to see how it bounced.