

A NINETEENTH CENTURY SHEEP WASH AT FRENHAM GREAT POND

Location

(SU 8409 4006)

The brick sheep wash, set into the dam at the outflow of Frensham Great Pond, south of Farnham, is probably one of the lesser known and more often overlooked relics of Surrey's past. It lies behind a modern brick parapet immediately adjacent to the small road that skirts the western corner of the pond by the hotel.

Description

The wash – quite distinct from a sheep dip – was intended to clean grease from the wool before shearing time. This was especially helpful in the days of hand shearing and since the advent of mechanical shearing the practice has virtually died out. Usually, flocks were herded through dammed up streams, but in the case of Frensham Great Pond the wash was rather more elaborate.

The wash itself is set into the centre of the dam and consists of a brick-built structure some 3.15m square and similarly deep. It has a brick floor and a short chute to the south where the sheep were forced into the water. To the north an inclined ramp leads out of the wash and presumably into further holding pens. Iron hinges remain in place at the deep end of the ramp, acting as hangers for a gate to control the exit of sheep. The water enters the structure through brick lined opening in the east wall and flows out through a long brick built square drain, dug into the back end of the dam to the west. There is no apparent way of blocking the flow of water into the wash, but the outflow passes through a stone lined slotted recess and can be dammed by the insertion of wooden boards to raise the water level to the required height. At some stage in the recent past a modern brick parapet has been constructed on top of the western wall of the wash to act as a safety barrier along the side of the road.

The exact date of the wash is unknown, but it is likely to have been constructed in the mid-19th century, perhaps shortly after the commons were enclosed in 1851. At that time the traditional commoners lost their grazing rights and the land became the property of a few large owners, principally a Mr George Cubitt. Certainly the bricks used in the construction would fit this date. Equally, the date the wash went out of use is unknown, but perhaps it ceased to be used at some time during the interwar period.

Sections of the walls are currently in a state of partial collapse because of pressure from tree roots and Waverley Borough Council's engineering department is considering how to deal with the problem. While most people walk past without even noticing the wash, and no one could claim it as an exciting monument, it nonetheless in its quiet way evokes an era that has now gone forever.

Audrey and David Graham

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FRENSHAM GREAT POND SHEEP WASH

