

Albury History Society - [alburyhistory.org.uk](http://alburyhistory.org.uk)

# THE TILLINGBOURNE RIVER STORY



The history of the river in Wotton, Abinger, Gomshall,  
Shere, Albury, Chilworth and Shalford, Surrey.

£1.50

16. Shere Lower mill NGR TQ074479 *Pond-bay and weir; workshops on site of mill.*

This is a Domesday site. In the fourteenth century, two wheels worked under the same roof.

17. Shere West mill NGR TQ068479 *pond-bay; pond; no trace of mill.*

Very little is known of this site. It is recorded as a corn-mill in a survey of Albury manor dated 1638. The pond is now being restored for fish conservation.



Shere village

18. Albury gardens NGR TQ063479 *Traces of formal canal-garden.*

Albury was the Earl of Arundel's favourite country retreat in the 1630's and one of the earliest examples of the landscape gardener's art. Hollar's skilfully composed etchings of terraced gardens opposite the Earl's 'poore cottage' sloping to the lakeside are brilliantly suggestive of the shimmering light reflected from trees and a 'ruined' casino or grotto on to a wide surface of still water. This sheet of tranquil water had an all-pervading presence in the 'Collector' Earl's nostalgic recollection of Albury during his final years at Padua. These water features were a minimally modified working landscape previously created by the diversion of streams and the building of dams for the purpose of milling and the keeping of fish.

The almost photographic truth of Hollar's drawings of Albury is authenticated by a survey of the Earl's Surrey estate in 1638 which similarly records a chain of ponds stretching from the village of Shere to the site of Old Albury church. Presumably the millponds of mills at sites 17 and 19 are depicted in Hollar's drawings.



Wenceslaus Hollar, *Albury*, c. 1670 (based on recollections of the 1630s.)

19. **Albury Park mill** NGR TQ062479 *millhouse; part of site of old village of Albury removed in connection with nineteenth-century landscaping.*

A corn mill on this site was destroyed by fire in 1727 following an explosion of gunpowder stored there. It was rebuilt as a corn mill but in 1795 was converted to a paper mill owned by Charles Ball, a leading paper manufacturer, who produced bank notes. The mill closed in the 1820s and by 1844 was in use as a laundry.

The availability of the Tillingbourne for making paper money attracted a number of leading banking families to the attractive valley in the early nineteenth century, of which Henry Drummond of Albury is the most famous. For his major contribution to the landscape of Albury and William Cobbett's observations on it, see Peter Brandon, *A history of Surrey*.

20. **The Silent Pool** NGR TQ061484 *Spring; Upper and Lower Ponds; culverts; dry leats.*

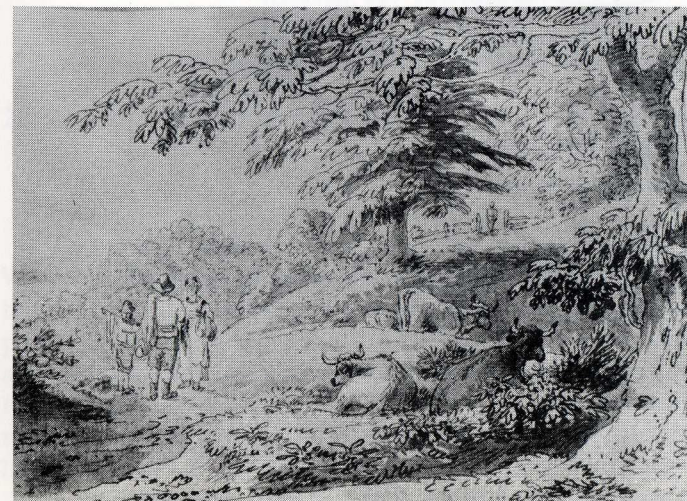
This interesting site was the most fiercely contested natural resource in the valley. Except in the driest of seasons (as in 1741) pure water copiously flowed from the Sherbourne (Shireburn) springs feeding the Upper Pond. Being impregnated with Chalk, the water had a fertilising power to an astonishing degree. In a survey of the Albury estate in 1638, only one pond is recorded. The present lower pond was constructed after that date for the purpose of taking water eastwards i.e. backwards along the valley to supply the fountains at the Albury gardens.



Albury church

The construction of the pond and a conducting leat is probably related to the construction of the Albury gardens by John Evelyn for Charles Howard, later Duke of Norfolk in the 1660s, for John Aubrey, in his *History of Surrey*, remarks on the use of the channelled water in the making of the gardens: "they have command of a spring in this park (the Shireburn) which they bring in a channel to the place where they would have the sand taken away; they dig a convenient part of the sand under which the water is to come and there the water (as it were) dissolves into the sand as you see sugar dissolved in wine...". Evelyn had earlier removed sand at Wotton when laying out his canals and terraced garden.

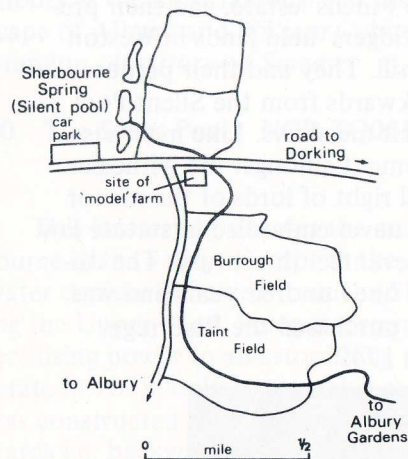
A third pond is shown on a map of Albury of 1782. This is now dry. It originated in the complicated dispute between the family of Finch, later lords Aylesford, the owners of Albury house and park, and the Risbridgers, freeholders on the Finchs' estate, and their pre-neighbours, the Duncombes. The Risbridgers' held lands in Weston and also near the site of Albury Park mill. They and their predecessors alleged that the diversion of water backwards from the Silent Pool deprived them of water for floating their meadows. Like most disputes of this nature, there was disagreement amongst the witnesses. The controversy centred upon the legal right of lords of the manor to divert water from streams. This was never embodied in statute law and was increasingly contested in the seventeenth century. The dispute continued intermittently for over one hundred years and was not finally ended until Lord Aylesford purchased the Risbridger property for the large sum of £1000 in 1749.



Anthony Devis, *Albury Park* (c. 1790). Devis resided for many years in Weston Street

The evidence on the ground is interesting. A culvert from the upper pond is visible at its west end. A dry water channel leading from this is traceable across the footpath below and through the woodland parallel to the highway leading from Shere to Newland's Corner, where it ends in swampy ground on the former site of a large pond clearly shown in a map of 1860. This channel marks an attempt to divert water from the upper pond into water meadows to the south without using the lower pond. The Finch's leat can be observed from the Victorian model farm across the main road. The culvert lay on the east side of the lower pond. A dry leat is traceable curving in front of the cottages set back on the north side of the road. It then curves to enter the model farm and can be followed on foot along its course parallel to the road to Albury. A line of trees then marks its course towards Albury gardens. The leat was taken to the

point above the central basin. Its survival is not the least significant aspect in which the valley of the Tillingbourne remains in contact with its recognisable past and it is a visible reminder of the period when both landlords and tenants kept constant watch on the level of water and the state of their watercourses.



Fountain leat from the Silent Pool

**21. Weston meads** NGR TQ054481 *Drained pond; mesh of water-channels.*

This floating system is shown on a map of 1782. It is evidently the work of the Duncombes or Risbridgers who sought to provide for a source of water for floating their meadows at a time when they claimed that their rightful source of supply from the Silent Pool had been diverted backwards to Albury. The site has been subsequently used for brick-making.

The final stretch of the Tillingbourne stream from Albury to the point where the river joins the Wey at Shalford was, for long, important for paper and gunpowder manufacture. The origin of the paper-making industry is connected with the West Surrey cloth industry. The earliest paper mills in Surrey produced paper used in pressing cloths and cloth-makers supplied the paper-mills with felts for pumping. The growth of the paper industry is also, in part, related to the decline of the cloth industry for the existence of buildings already in use, or had been converted from, water-mills was a powerful factor in setting up the paper industry. Fulling mills were particularly suitable for conversion because some of their equipment was very suitable for use in paper-making, the hammers, for example, could be used for pounding rags into fibrous pulp or 'stuff' in the preparation of paper. Another control on the siting of paper mills was the purity of water, especially in the production of white paper. The siting of paper mills exclusively below the issue of the Sherbourne spring is probably not accidental for this stretch of the river had the maximum purity of water. (A.H. Shorter).



Botting's Mill

**22. Albury mill** NGR TQ062479 *Late-nineteenth century building converted to use as laboratories*

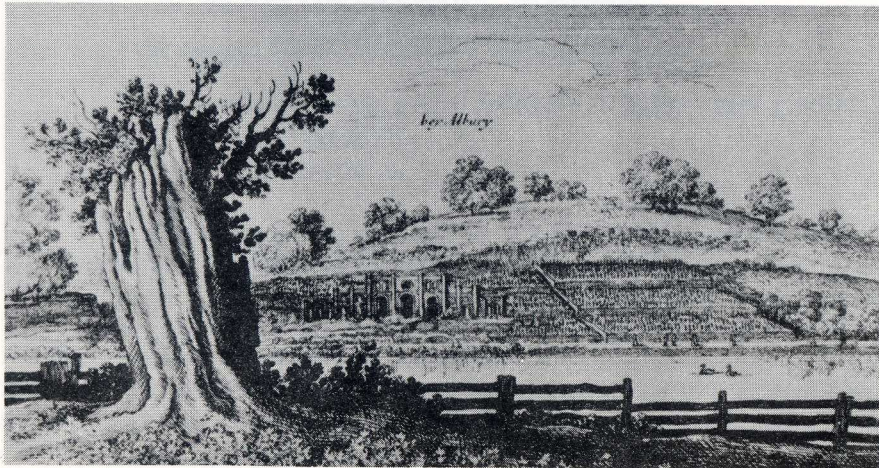
This was probably on the site of the mill serving the manor of Weston and is thus an ancient milling site. The old timber-framed building was destroyed by arson in the mid-nineteenth century, the person responsible being hanged. Although of uninteresting appearance, it is an unusual example of a watermill converted from a three-stone mill driven by an overshot wheel to more efficient rollers driven by a turbine. Although this lengthened the working life of the mill, Messrs. Botting and Son moved to larger premises at the newly built mill, still in use, on the site of Old Postford mill (site 24) in 1890. It was simply uneconomic for them to continue in

the smaller basis with so much keen competition from the large steam-driven mills. The introduction of roller grinding, producing a fine white flour coming into vogue, was an expensive improvement rarely attempted by country millers, whose conservatism itself acted as a brake on change. The accessibility of the railway station of Chilworth may have been a factor in the rise of new plant at Postford.

**23. Postford Upper mill** NGR TQ041480 *No traces apart from Waterloo Pond and wheel pit*

This mill, and its neighbour, Postford Lower mill, were both papermills in the same ownership of Charles Ball at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He appears to have worked this mill directly and his son the other. Both mills ran economically because of the large demand during the Napoleonic Wars for paper and bank notes, but both were difficult to manage successfully with the return to normal trading in the early nineteenth century. The Upper mill was disused for a time in the 1830s and finally closed down some years later.

Sited on flat land on the lower course of the Tillingbourne, it was necessary to divert water along a race for a length of nearly one mile from Albury in order to obtain the necessary difference in level between the race and the stream to provide a sufficient head of water. The artificial channel, now largely dry, can be traced without difficulty.



Wenceslaus Hollar, *Albury* (c. 1670), showing ornamental buildings removed when Evelyn built the great terrace.

**24. Postford Lower mill** NGR TQ039480 *Modern mill occupying site*

Gunpowder mills are shown clustered around Albury (Postford) pond on Seller's map of Surrey, c.1693.

This site is now occupied by C.A.Bottings' corn and animal feed mill and trout farm. Owners of the paper mill on this site found it difficult to trade successfully in the 1820s and 1830s with the decline in the issue of bank notes and normal trade in paper. For a time, however, Sir William Magnay, described by the Surrey historian Brayley as 'the principal paper maker of Surrey', was paper-making here in the mid-nineteenth century. He sold both the Upper and Lower mills in 1865 and the Lower mill appears to have closed for paper making in 1876.



Water-power channel, Chilworth gunpowder works (middle site)