



## The Bell Brook, Wyre Forest

CEDRIC QUAYLE

This little brook rises at a point in the corner of an old orchard at SO756746, eventually joining the Dowles Brook no more than about one and two thirds of a mile later. It enters Cold Harbour Coppice and in a short distance becomes the boundary between Cold Harbour Coppice and Lords Yard Coppice where it is joined by a lesser, and so far as I am aware, unnamed brook.

It soon enters what is apparently a man made feature, though long since neglected. This curious corner of the Wyre Forest had at one time been a small garden. I had known George Tolley most of my life and by chance discovered that it was he who had planted and laid out the garden between 1929 and 1930. He took me down there in the late 1980s to show me how it had been laid out originally. You can still see the rectangular layout, with the stream diverted to flow round both sides of the rectangle. It once had a square and a round pond inside the rectangle and had been planted up with ferns, reeds with the surrounds turfed. I remember as a boy noticing the remains of some wire netting and a wicket gate. These are long since gone. The large conifers there were already in place and the Butchers, then the residents of Beaucastle who had ordered this work to be done, called the place Arcadia. Rhododendrons were also planted and, as they usually do, swamped the area and most of the plants did not survive. The rhododendrons were removed by English Nature (as it was then) but they were persuaded to leave all the other features as well as a few shrubs and trees which are not native to the forest.

Not far below Arcadia, Bell Brook runs into the Beaucastle Reservoir through a swampy area at the shallow end. The reservoir has been described elsewhere (in the booklet *Ruskin and Bewdley*) and was created by the order of George Baker, the builder and owner of Beaucastle, in 1890. Bewdley was looking for another water supply and George Baker, at his own expense, threw the dam across Bell Brook with a view to supply water to Bewdley at 7d per 1000 gallons. In the event, this reservoir was never used for its intended purpose.

Another boyhood memory is of a boat house alongside the path at the point where you reach the water, going downstream. The little inlet is still there and there also used to be a diving board in the center of the dam (at its deepest point) and it was in this reservoir that my father leant to swim. An extraordinary incident occurred in the winter of 1917, a much colder and prolonged period of freezing weather than even we are having this December 2010. The schools finished early and my father would walk home, the family would collect their skates and lanterns from Unclyls Farm where they were living, place the lanterns around the water and skate away. One

night, there was a great whipcrack and the ice broke from end to end, seemingly caused by water seeping out of the reservoir causing a void to form under the ice. But so great was the thickness of the ice that it simply settled down so that half of the ice was then on a slope and skaters were able to enjoy the unusual experience of skating downhill.

The brook now runs through what is marked on the OS maps as "The Swan Pool". The origin of the name is a mystery and was probably created by either George Baker or Peter Adam, Baker's successor.

Next it runs through Unclyls Farm holding and under a modest culvert built by the Guild of St. George in 1908 to make a new roadway access to St. George's Farm. The bricks used in this culvert were made on the premises, so to speak, by George Baker's men in a kiln he had had built at Beaucastle. The culvert is still in use and carries tractors and timber wagons on a regular basis. I have walked through it, though it has been extended with large round concrete pipes and would now require more effort.

From here the brook enters Hitterhill Coppice now owned by Natural England. When George Baker died in 1910, Peter Adam (of W. & R.R.Adams, the carpet manufacturers) bought the estate and eventually sold most of it off in 1930, but the family kept Hitterhill Coppice, passing it on to his daughters, the Misses Adams who held it until they died in the early 1970s. Much of Hitterhill Coppice was laid out with plantings of rhododendrons and a number of pathways cut into the steep sides of the Bell Brook valley sides. The paths are still there but not the stone built shelter that used to be on the top of the valley side with a view down into and across Bell Brook. Very considerable works were also carried out on the brook itself as anyone who has walked down there will realize. A series of small lakes was created and further down, some built structures in the shape of a hexagon can still be seen. They have always been known as the Fish Ponds but I have not met anyone who remembers them used for that purpose. There is in this part of the brook what I imagine (though I cannot be sure) to be the only "proper" waterfall in the forest and is immediately below one of the lakes.

The final feature before it joins the Dowles Brook, and thence the Severn, is the culvert under the old railway track. You can walk through the culvert but it feels a faintly hazardous trip as there is a bend in the middle so the first half of this 60 yard tunnel has no beckoning light at the far end.



# Wyre Forest Study Group

## REFERENCE

Wardle, P., and Quayle, C. 1989 Ruskin and Bewdley, Guild of St. George

## NOTE

This brook is known locally by some as Stoneybatch Brook (Ed.)



Pool near 'Arcadia', 22 March 2004

Rosemary Winnall



Beaucastle Reservoir, 31 July 2009

Rosemary Winnall



Cedric Quayle at waterfall 1948

Quayle family



'Fish pond', 13 January 2004

Rosemary Winnall



Waterfall, Bell Brook, 13 January 2004

Rosemary Winnall