



Chaddesden Historical Group

www.chaddesdenhistorygroup.co.uk/newsletters

Newsletter 81

August 2024

Lea's Brook

The Chaddesden Historical Group collection includes a letter from a Mrs MacKay which says:

Prior to 1923 my father's uncle, Arthur Lea, lived at Brook Farm which is at the bottom of the lane behind the Wilmot Arms in Chaddesden. The previous farmer would not allow local children to go near the brook that flows through the farm land, but Uncle Arthur saw things differently and made it known that the children were welcome there.

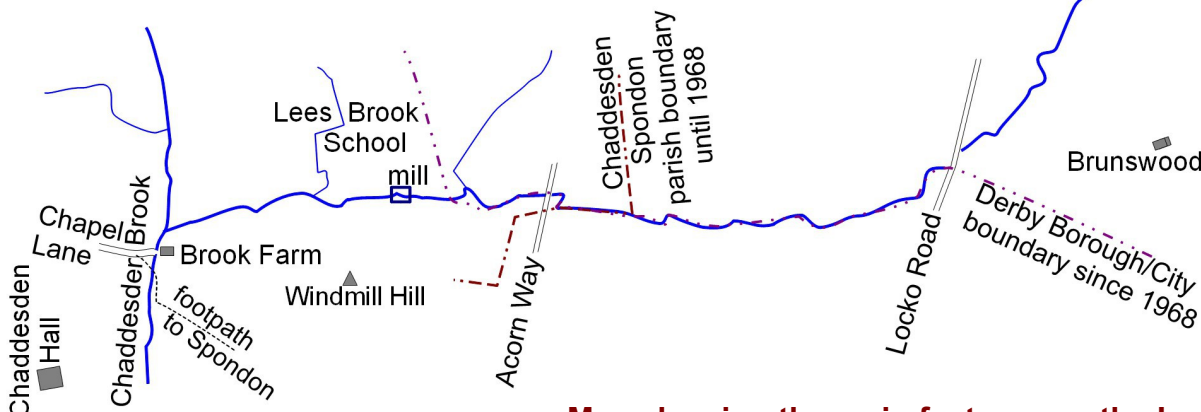
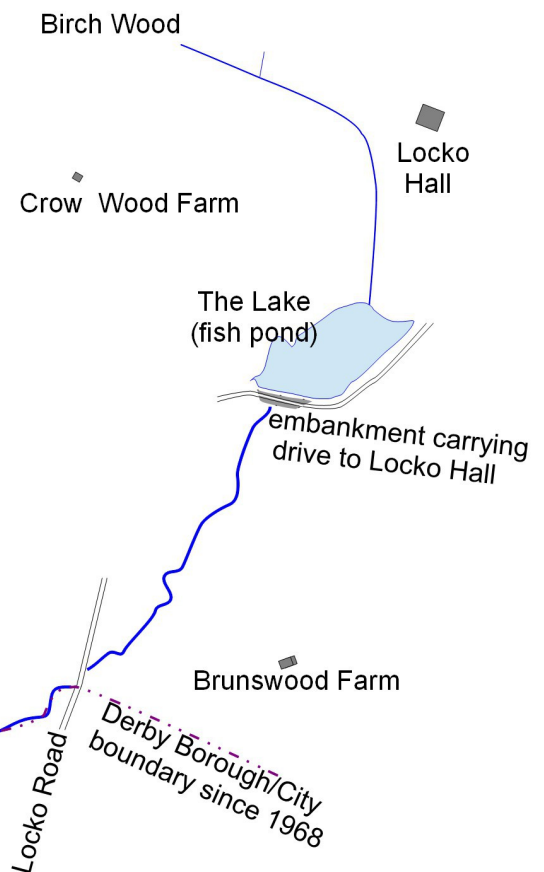
It then became general to talk of going to play in Lea's brook, from which Lees Brook School presumably eventually took its name. This means, of course, that, to be historically accurate, the name should be spelt Lea's Brook School.

Arthur Lea, together with his sister and my father, W. J. Lea, who lived with him, left the farm in 1923. An auction of the farm animals and implements, was held at Brook Farm on 19th March 1923.

H W MacKay (née Lea)

It is a nice story but it does not fit the facts. The name Lees Brook appears on an Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1878-79 well before Arthur Lea arrived at Brook Farm (1912 at the earliest). The same name is applied to the brook in Spondon parish well upstream from Brook Farm. It is coincidence that the farmer at Brook Farm for some years up to 1923 was named Lea. More likely the name comes from Spondon meadow land (leys or lees) through which the brook passes. The name Lee Sycke (a sick or sitch being a local name for a stream) appears in a document of 1569.

The source of the Lees Brook appears to be the lake in Locko Park but careful examination of the Ordnance Survey (OS) map shows that the lake is fed from a stream which has its source between Birch Wood and Locko Hall. A note referring to the lake on older OS maps states: *Surface of Water 268.9 [feet] 20th Jan 1872*. The water level is regulated by a weir on the other side of the embankment that retains the lake and carries the drive from Locko Road to the hall. The brook flows in a south-westerly direction across Brunswood Farm to pass under Locko Road where the altitude has already reduced to 234 feet. ➤



Map showing the main features on the Lees Brook

Lees Brook

Continuing on a westerly course, the Lees Brook enters Chaddesden parish where the flow is augmented by two unnamed watercourses that drained Chaddesden Moor. Between the two there was, until the early 18th century, a mill driven by the water of the brook. It seems an unlikely location given the lack of access roads and the limited water flow at this location but the dirt track that once gave access would have been ploughed up long ago and damming the brook would build up a head of water to allow a mill to work for short periods. Several historic documents refer to the existence of a mill. They are described in "Bradcar Watermill, Chaddesden" by Peter Cholerton which may be found on the Chaddesden Historical Group web site (see below).

Brook Farm once extended across the brook to include two fields totalling 17 acres on the north side. There was no bridge so the only access was by fording the brook or by going the long way around up Morley Road where a gateway led into one of the fields.

This isolated part of the farm was bought by Derbyshire County Council as the site for a school which opened in September 1954 as two separate schools, Chaddesden County Secondary School and the County Grammar School, Chaddesden. The grammar school was short-lived, moving to a new site in Spondon Park in 1957. The secondary modern school passed into Derby County Borough Council ownership at the 1968 borough boundary extension. Since the boundary change the Lees Brook marks the borough, now city, boundary between Locko Road bridge and the school – Derby to the south and Derbyshire to the north.

The secondary school, now a comprehensive, was renamed Olive Eden School after the last chair of Chaddesden Parish Council, and later renamed again to Lees Brook School. Since 1 January 2017 it has been an academy under the control of the Archway Learning Trust and is now named Lees Brook Academy.

Just north of Brook Farm house, the brook joins a watercourse that once drained Field Farm but has almost disappeared, the flow having been intercepted by street drains. From here the brook flows southwards and the name changes to Chaddesden Brook according to the OS. Passing under the access road to Brook Farm, under a footbridge at the end of Chapel Lane, under Maine Drive, through Chaddesden Park then partly in culvert through the estate, it joins the River Derwent close to Derwent Parade bridge.

The 1921 census names the inhabitants of Brook Farm as Arthur Lea (age 45), Catherine Lea (41) both born in Staffordshire and their 19-year-old nephew, William John, born in Crail, Fife, Scotland, who would have been Mrs MacKay's father.

The place where the village children would have played was most likely near Chapel Lane bridge, so the name, Lea's Brook, actually applied to part of the Chaddesden Brook. It would be difficult to play there today as the brook is well enclosed in a deep channel and securely fenced. The brook is readily accessible in Chaddesden Park and has been a popular play area for local children since the park opened to the public in 1936.

Peter Barnes
with thanks to Peter Cholerton for additional information

Further Reading

Bradcar Watermill at <https://www.chaddesdenhistorygroup.co.uk/buildings/bradcar-watermill.pdf>

Chaddesden County Grammar School mentioned in Chaddesden Historical Group newsletter 62
<https://www.chaddesdenhistorygroup.co.uk/newsletter/newsletter62.pdf>

Lees Brook Academy web site – <https://www.leesbrook.co.uk/>

The Chaddesden Historical Group collection contains a large number of uncaptioned photographs taken on a visit to Lees Brook School in February 2011.