The value of ponds for heritage

Archaeological and historical value of ponds

A survey undertaken by Freshwater Habitats Trust estimated that at least 1 in 10 of all lowland ponds had some historic significance. For the vast majority of ponds, however, this is, as yet, un-researched and unrecorded.

Ponds can be of historic value for two main reasons:

- They may be important historic *features* in their own right: e.g. moats, fish ponds, duck decoys, brick pits or places with literary and community associations.

- Both their structure and their sediments may *contain* important information about the history of the waterbody, its surrounds and the wider environment (a pollen record, historical artefacts etc.). In some cases, particularly in more remote areas, these sediment records may span thousands of years, and provide a unique 'section through time'.

Historic pond types

Box 4 lists a range of historical uses of ponds, though some pond types are far better researched than others. Fish ponds, for example, are often well documented.
Marl pits, on the other hand, are incredibly common in some parts of the country, and yet relatively little is known about them.

Not all ponds had a single use: water and food supply, for example, or defence and status, may have been combined. In many instances ponds are just one part of the historic character of a site. For example: ponds may be part of an industrial complex, or a fish drying/processing area; they may be associated with dwellings, or be part of an historic landscape design.

Any conservation work undertaken on a pond of historic interest should take account of both the pond itself and its overall setting, if this is an important part of the historic interest. See the Survey factsheet for more information.

Ponds in the landscape

We are all attracted to water, though it can be difficult to rationalise why this is. Maybe it's because water is so important to our health and wellbeing, perhaps it is the beauty of surface reflections or fascination with the mysterious hidden, world beneath the surface.

Ponds and pools are a visual focus in very many landscapes, and the other-worldliness of ponds has certainly profoundly influenced the minds of some. Less than a mile from Freshwater Habitats Trust's offices near Oxford, there is a secluded sunlit pond on a wooded hillside where, some 60 years ago, CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien used to sit together, dreaming up their magical other worlds.

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Tolkein and CS Lewis sat beside this pond dreaming Narnia and Mordor

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Ponds for people

Ponds are small-scale features that can be easily encompassed and cared for by the communities who live around them.

They are often a focus for town or village life and feeding the ducks, sailing toy-boats and netting for newts or sticklebacks is a well-remembered part of many childhoods.

As people become more interested in their environment there can also be real enthusiasm for managing or creating a local pond in order to help 'green' the surrounds or 'put something back'. Working together to look after a pond can be not only an enjoyable group activity, but help to develop a wide range of community skills and knowledge.

Ponds and their wildlife hold a fascination for young and old alike

Box 1. Some of the many historical and cultural uses of ponds

Curling ponds	Flax-retting ponds	Ornamental garden ponds
Decoy ponds	Forge/furnace ponds	Peat ponds
Dew ponds	Hammer ponds	Pond bays
Distillery ponds	Heathland ponds	Reclamation ponds
Drinking water tarns	Ice ponds	Silt ponds
Droving ponds	Livestock watering ponds	Stew ponds
Duck ponds	Marl pits	Subsidence ponds
Dye ponds	Mill ponds	Swimming pools
Extraction ponds	Moats	Traction engine ponds
Fish ponds	Old farm ponds	Watercress beds

Freshwater Habitats Trust

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