Maidenhead
Civic Society

York Stream

A review of past efforts to keep the stream clear

by

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Introduction
Since 2002 York Stream in the town centre has been dry from ca. June to November due to lack of flow in the stream system north of the town. A similar pattern occurred at the end of the 1980's when the National Rivers Authority (now Environment Agency) blamed low groundwater levels due to dry winters. This lack of water has resulted in an unsightly smelly ditch running through the town for half of the year. To inform the choice of what to do about the current situation the Civic Society decided to study what had happened in the past.

Old maps were studied to look for changes to the stream system. In addition past vestry records, statute books and minute books of the Borough of Maidenhead were read for references to problems with keeping the stream clear. After the creation of the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead the recording and publishing of minutes changed. From 1972-74 the record has no index so information is difficult to find. What is known from other sources after 1972-4 is detailed at the end of the summary of the minutes.

These records show that the stream requires regular clearing of obstructions including fallen trees, weed growth and silt.

Evidence from Maps[1]
Maps of the area from Cookham to Maidenhead dating from the 18th century to the present day have been looked at for indications of changes to the stream system north of Maidenhead. Such changes would have been implemented presumably primarily to drain fields for agriculture, provide ditches for flood defence and it would seem, in one case, to improve water flow. The area is primarily farmland but with some gravel extraction which may have had an indirect impact[2]. In Maps 2 and 3 the stream system has been marked in blue[3].

Map1: Rocque's map of 1761 shows that the White Brook (then called the Wide Brook) apparently was not connected to the stream at Cookham. It is not clear which way the Cookham stream flowed. By 1804-ca1813 (see Map 2) the stream bisecting Marsh Meadow seems to have disappeared to be replaced by ditches along the edge of the meadow[4]. The flow of the White Brook is also unclear but if this map is accurate[5], was presumably from the Thames flowing westwards.

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[1] At end of document.

[2] Perhaps by affecting groundwater flow. A recent hydrological assessment done in the area notes that the presence of lakes may distort the passage of groundwater which flows more easily through them than through the ground (Lewin, Fryer & Partners 2004).

[3] In Map 2 it is not always easy to distinguish streams from field boundaries/ditches and in Map 3 only the streams clearly indicated on the map have been marked in blue, other streams may have existed. At Cookham, Marsh Meadow Ditch is marked in blue but not Berries Ditch.

[4] In 1877 the Conservators of the Thames were asked to stop up the river end of the Marsh Ditch to prevent water flowing from there into the Moor. The following year it was decided to fill in the Thames end of Berries Ditch (Vestry Minutes, Cookham Parish Council; see vol 1, Dodds E M. *Historical notices on Cookham*: 2 vol Ms in Maidenhead Library). Marsh Meadow ditch was reconnected to the Thames, north of its original connection, in 1994 to improve water flow in the stream system. It is currently clogged with silt and reeds and needs clearing.

[5] Rocque's map (2 mile to 1 inch) should be used with caution (see www.berkshireenclosure.org.uk).

Map 2: First edition of the 1-inch to one mile Ordnance Survey maps surveyed between 1804 and ca 1813, shows a connection between the stream from Cookham and the White Brook[6]. At that point two streams appear to flow towards Maidenhead, though only the one that connected with the White Brook reached the town. The other, presumably the precursor of Maidenhead Ditch, ceased flowing north of North Town Moor. At this time Strandwater apparently did not yet exist[7].

Map 3: First edition of 6 inch to 1 mile O.S map surveyed in 1875[8] shows ponds at Cookham, the creation of Strandwater and the alteration of the stream system - changes which seem to have affected the flow of the White Brook. Strandwater connected with the White Brook but not with Maidenhead Ditch (see Map 4). The predominant flow in 1875 from Strandwater was almost certainly eastwards towards the Thames; flow is not indicated in this map but the White Brook is shown flowing eastwards in the 1914 O.S. edition. Although not clear from Map 3[9] there appears to have also been some flow towards Maidenhead. In 1888 dams which had been placed in Strandwater by the local land owner were dismantled by main force because they were held to be causing lack of water on Widbrook Common and had also affected Maidenhead Moor where it was reported that "the water here was almost stagnant and was in a filthy state".[10] Later still, in 1924/25, York Stream (then called the Canal Stream) is described as having its source in the Strandwater near Cookham and flowing in a southerly direction right through the Borough subsequently joining the river below Bray Lock and being the only natural watercourse with running water in the Borough.[11]

Map 4: Close-up of Map 3 showing the lack of connection between Maidenhead Ditch and the White Brook.

Map 5: The Green Way map showing the current stream system. If Map 5 is compared with Map 3 it will be seen that part of the White Brook has disappeared[12]. It was only in 1948[13] that a connection from the Strandwater/White Brook system was made with the Maidenhead Ditch creating a single stream. This very awkward connection is now completely clogged with reeds, as is most of the Ditch. It seems that since 1948 the White Brook has reversed direction and flows mostly westwards towards Maidenhead except during flood conditions when it definitely flows eastwards to the Thames.

Map 6: Compiled from adjacent sheets of the second edition (1899) of the 25 inch to one mile O.S. maps of Maidenhead, showing the stream system before the 1920s when, due to the

[6] First edition of the 1 inch to 1 mile O.S. map published by Major Colby Tower in 1822 and thereafter subject to continuous revision largely confined to adding the new railways. It is assumed that the stream details are unchanged from the original in these later maps. The map shown here dates from after 1854, when the Maidenhead to High Wycombe railway line was opened. The 1891 maps are published in facsimile reprint by David & Charles.

[7] Interestingly Widbrook Common appears to have been much larger in those days (compare Map 2 with Map 3).

[8] For first edition on the 6 inch to 1 mile O.S. map Berks XXIV published 1882. The mapping seems to draw on the 1852 enclosure maps (available on www.berkshireenclosure.org.uk). Strandwater occurs in the 1852 map, as do other features.

[9] Only what are clearly streams have been marked in blue but minor streams may have existed.

[10] "The alleged obstruction of the Widbrook Water supply" M.Ad. May 23 1888.

[11] See Borough of Maidenhead Minutes Vol 17, 1924-25 page 124-126, Minute 280.

[12] The dry streambed is close to the flood bund which actually crosses it. This dry bed is still marked as a stream on recent O.S. Explorer maps.

[13] See Minutes Vol 40, 1947-49. This work coincided with the de-silting of Chapel Arches.

widening of Chapel Arches, the greater part of water flow was directed down the current channel rather than that next to the Bear Hotel[14].

Evidence from Vestry Records, Minute Books and other sources

As can be seen from these records, dating as far back as the 19th century (see below), streams and ditches north of Maidenhead were regularly cleared. This was the responsibility of the Borough Surveyor; however ca 1938 the responsibility for the main tributaries of the Thames including the Maidenhead stream passed to the Thames Conservancy, now the Environment Agency[15]. In the recent past the Environment Agency has reportedly greatly reduced the amount of money spent on dredging the Thames and its tributaries, apparently due to a year on year reduction in government grants for this work. It is clear that if the stream is not cleared regularly, it clogs up and water cannot flow.

Conclusion

The records show that only with regular clearance can this system deliver water to Maidenhead town centre on a year round basis.

Clearing more of the vegetation and silt accumulated since 1990-1993 will help increase flow. Removal of other obstructions such as the stone aggregate dumped in the streambed during the construction of the Hines Meadow car park would also help. In addition it might be worthwhile attempting to narrow the channel on Maidenhead Moor widened in the 1960s to create the flood relief ditch[16].

Work on Maidenhead Ditch was proposed as part of the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme (MWEFAS) arising from the promise in the planning application of January 1991 for the scheme that said:

"Existing channels which pass through the centre of Maidenhead town will be upgraded to offer greater capacity during flood time, whilst their appearance under normal conditions will also be considerably improved"

This remains to be done.

[14] According to the minutes (Vol 17, 1924-5) this was to be a concrete channel of minimum width of 8 ft.

[15] The minutes record clearing in 1898; 1910-11; 1918-19; 1924-25; 1931-32; 1937-38; 1944-45; 1947-49 and 1967-68. In 1969 representations were to be made to the Thames Conservancy for the proper maintenance of the channel, and in 1973 they were again asked to clear the stream. However, by then the minutes were un-indexed and subsequent volumes are useless as a source of information.

[16] The wide channel causes the water to slow and drop its silt providing the ideal habitat for reed growth. One method used to narrow watercourses is marginal shelving. See NRA magazine *Newscast,* summer 1992 p 5.

NOTES ON ACTION TAKEN IN THE PAST RELATING TO THE CLEANSING OF YORK STREAM

Summaries from Vestry Records, Statute Books[17], Minutes & Other Sources

A. Vestry Records

September 27th 1838: St Mary's Chapel, Maidenhead[18]

"At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parishes of Cookham and Bray within the Borough of Maidenhead in Vestry assembled pursuant to Notice for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of adopting means to remove the nuisances arising from the collection of Mud and Filth at the Chapel and Moor Arches within the said Borough.
The Rev. G. C. Gorham in the Chair.
It was resolved on the motion of Mr James Lovegrove, seconded by Mr King, that the Surveyors of the Parishes of Bray and Cookham within the District of the Corporation of Maidenhead be urged jointly to abate the Nuisance now existing in the Water courses under the Chapel and Moor Arches and that the expense attending the same be equally divided between the Surveyors of the two Parishes.

G. C. Gorham
Chairman"

13 December 1877 Holy Trinity Church, Cookham[19]

Proposed improvements in the Moor Common
1. The conservators of the Thames be asked to stop up the north or river end of the Marsh Ditch so as to prevent the water flowing from thence into the Moor.
2. That an open drain be cut from Taylor's corner to carry surface water from the west end of the Street to the Marsh Ditch and a drain be laid under the Moor entrance to the Marsh.
3.Low places on the Moor to be filled in.
4. Owners of the ditches in Cookham Moor to be asked to clean them out.

25 March 1878
It was decided to fill in the north or Thames end of Berries Ditch.

There follows many minutes (dating up to 1949) relating to the cleaning of both ditches and the Fleet.

[17] Further investigation of vestry records and statute books may yield more information. Scrutiny of Borough of Maidenhead Minute Books was thorough. Cookham vestry records may contain a record of an incident in 1888 ("The alleged obstruction of the Widbrook Water supply", M.Ad May 23 1888) when dams constructed in Strande Water were dismantled forcibly. The dams were removed because they were said to be causing lack of water on Widbrook Common and had also affected Maidenhead Moor. It was reported that "the water here was almost stagnant and was in a filthy state".
[18] From archives of SS Andrew & Mary Magdalene, the Borough church of Maidenhead.
[19] From vol 1, Dodds E M Historical notices on Cookham 2 vol MS BC 94, in Maidenhead Library. Cookham Parish Council was not set up till 1896.

B. Maidenhead Corporation Statute Book, no. M/AC/1/2/7, Nov 1895 to January 1899 (in Berkshire Record Office)

29 July 1898
f 431-432 The stream at the sewage outfall.
The stream is said to be almost stagnant.

3 October 1898
f 466 Watercourse
A letter from the Medical Officer of health states that the watercourse from the railway arch extending northwards to the boundary of the Borough to be in a foul and unsanitary condition. Recommended that the several persons responsible should be called on to cleanse their respective portions of the watercourse.

5 December 1898
f 500 Watercourses
Arrangements of the cleansing of the watercourse extending from the railway arch adjoining the meadow at the sewage outfall to the Borough boundary at North Town have been engaging the attention of the Committee (General Purposes).

C. Minutes of Borough/Corporation of Maidenhead (from Maidenhead Library records)

Vol 3 1910-11
page 200, min 478 Cleansing of Canal Stream
Streambed between Ray Mill Rd and Chapel Arches cleaned of silt and weeds.

Vol 11 1918-19
page 220, min 503 Canal Stream
Stream between Chapel Arches and the Great Western Railway has become so choked with weeds and silt that its cleaning is a matter of importance.

Vol 17 1924-25
page 49, min 130 Waterways
Sub-Committee appointed to traverse waterways in the lower part of the Borough and report as to any improvements which might be made for dealing with flood waters.

page 124-126, min 280 Waterways
The following report has been received from the Sub-Committee referred to in item 130:

Canal Stream.
The Sub-Committee traversed for a considerable distance the banks of the Canal Stream and Moor Cut, visiting all the spots at which it was reported there were hindrances to the passage of the stream or floodwater.

As the Committee are doubtless aware, the Canal Stream, having its source in the Strand Water near Cookham, flows in a southerly direction right through the Borough and part of the Parish of Bray, subsequently joining the river some distance below Bray Lock. At the present

time this is the only natural watercourse with running water in the Borough and is utilised to pass away the purified effluent from the Sewage Works.

For this reason alone it would be important that its course was free from obstruction, but in addition it provides the principal relief from flood water, and these facts together render it highly desirable that its discharging capacity should be improved to the fullest possible limit and so maintained.

Unfortunately at the present moment the bed of the stream is silted up between Ray Mill Road and the Chapel Arches, it follows a very tortuous course, partly underground through the curtilage of the Bear Hotel where it is seriously throttled down, and there is a weir, a narrow sluice opening, at the Canal bridge in York Avenue.

The Town Clerk is advised that the Council as such have no control of the stream or watercourse through which it passes and could not enforce any improvement in its condition unless it became in such a state as to be a nuisance and injurious to health.

Any improvement, therefore, which the Local Authority might desire to carry out would have to be effected with the consent of the riparian owners, and your Sub-Committee can only suggest at the present time:-

(1) That the proposal to canalise the ditch adjoining the Picture Theatre[20] by the construction of a concrete channel to a minimum width of 8 feet and at such a depth as will ensure this becoming the route of the main stream in preference, but in addition to the existing watercourse through the Bear Hotel Yard[21], be proceeded with as soon as possible. This to be carried out under the agreement recently arrived at in connection with the proposed widening of the Chapel Arches.

(2) That steps be taken to remove the narrow sluice opening and permanent weir near the Canal Bridge, enlarge the waterway at this spot, and substitute a moveable weir which would be entirely withdrawn in the event of a flood.

Moor Cut.

With regard to the Moor Cut, your Sub-Committee are satisfied that even if at one time this contained running water, to-day this is simply a watercourse draining the land through which it has been cut, and has no stream.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that if steps could be taken to widen and deepen the same it could be made a substantial means of relief in time of flood.

Vol 18 1925-26

page 228, min 522 Improvement of the Moor Cut

Borough Surveyor presented the results of the survey and levels taken along the whole length of the channel of Moor Cut from the Holmanlease footbridge near Garden Cottages to the junction with the Canal stream opposite the sewage meadow; also a report showing that as the bed of the stream at the latter junction is 3ft 8ins lower than the bed at the Holmanlease bridge

[20] Holmes Place Health Club in 2005 on site of Picture Theatre. See photo of theatre on page 34 of *Images of Maidenhead* by Luke Over, 1997, Breedon; photos from the Advertiser.

[21] This stream no longer exists. For location see Map 6.

it would be possible to grade the Cut from end to end and ensure a flow of water through the same.

Vol 24 1931-32
page 159, min 368 Canal Stream
The Borough Surveyor has been instructed to remove obstructing vegetable accumulation and top silt in the part of the Canal Stream between York Avenue and the railway bridge.

page 199, min 469 Canal Stream
The Canal stream between York Avenue bridge and the railway embankment has been cleared of all obstructions and a large quantity of silt has been removed and by permission of the owners placed over the St Ives meadow. The stream between the Bear Hotel and Ray Mill Road has also been cleansed.
The bed of the Moor Cut is obstructed by silt and weed between Holmanlease bridge and the Moor Arches and the Committee consider that some of the balance in hand might be usefully expended on clearing this part of the stream.

page 223, min 516 Canal Stream
Application has been received from the owners of premises adjoining the canal stream for the cleansing of this stream between York Avenue bridge and the Chapel Arches.

Vol 25 1932-33
page 210, min 494
Borough Surveyor reports that during the recent dry weather refuse and other debris has been removed from the Canal Stream between the railway embankment and the Chapel Arches and he has been directed to continue this work northwards to the Holmanlease footbridge.

Vol 30 1937-38
pages 203-4, min 416 Watercourses
Attention has been drawn to the condition of watercourses in the Borough. Committee have investigated the legal position which does not appear to place any obligation of cleansing upon any persons or authority except in cases where a nuisance which is prejudicial to health arises.
Understood the Thames Conservancy are seeking an order transferring to them the responsibility for the main tributaries of the river as a result of which it is anticipated that in the near future they will assume control of the Moor Cut and the Canal Stream. It may be some time however before they are able to take action and in the meantime the Borough Surveyor is authorised to remove the larger obstructions and rubbish thrown into the stream at a cost not exceeding £25.

Vol 37 1944-45
page 226, min 1132 Canal Stream - Health Committee
Chairman called attention to the filthy and stagnant condition of the Canal Stream which he considered would be a breeding ground for mosquito.
Resolves: that the Thames Conservancy be asked to give urgent consideration to the question of cleaning out this stream.

Vol 40 1947-49
page 92, min 416 Canal Stream - General Purpose Committee: Jan 1948
The Borough Surveyor had made representations to the Thames Conservancy with regard to the condition of the Canal Stream from York Road to the northern borough boundary. The Conservancy Chief Engineer had prepared a scheme for the complete clearing out and re-grading of this stream including a proposal to make a connection at the upper end thereof to the White Brook in such a way that a limited quantity of water would at all times flow through the stream.
The quantity of water would be controlled and provision made for stopping the inlet if circumstances made it necessary or desirable. The Chief Engineer submitted a scheme for the observation of the Council before placing it before the Conservators.

Surveyor stated in conjunction with scheme desirable to reconstruct culvert at Ray Mill Rd east and to lower the invert of the culvert at Chapel Arches.

page 177, min 783 Chapel Arches - Highways Committee Feb: 1948
Borough Surveyor reported on satisfactory progress with de-silting works at Chapel Arches and repair work including the necessary modification in the invert of the main arch to comply with requirements of scheme for re-levelling the bed of the canal stream.

Vol 47 1955-56
page 39, min 176 Flood Prevention Scheme
Town Clerk reported that meeting held with Thames Conservancy concerning flood prevention works. States that Thames Conservancy had agreed to keep the main river stream clear and undertake a detailed survey and examine the possibility of executing major works to prevent minor floods.

[There follows many minutes relating to the proposed flood prevention scheme, not quoted here]

Vol 53 1961-62
page 237, min 921 Flood Relief Scheme
Borough Surveyor reported that major work of excavation for the flood relief scheme was to be carried out between Bray and Green Lane

Vol 54 1962-63
page 262, min 1008 d)
Borough Surveyor reported good progress. Main flood channel had been completed between Bray and Forlease Road. Work also in progress on section near Moor Arches.

Vol 56 1964-65
page 24, min 123 Flood Relief Scheme
Thames Conservancy have agreed to divide into 2 streams the flood relief ditch south of footpath leading from Garden Cottages to Blackamoor lane.

Vol 57 1965-66
page 100, min 304 Flood Relief Scheme Stage II
Borough Surveyor reported on progress of work in construction of Flood Relief Scheme at Chapel Arches. Committee concerned about the appearance of this section of the FR channel as an amenity in relation to the proposed pedestrian walk along the eastern bank.

Vol 59 1967-68
page 165, min 638 Flood Relief Scheme
Flood Relief Scheme constructed by the Thames Conservancy has now been completed.

page 165, min: 639 Cleaning the Channel
The King George VI Club for the elderly people have been in touch with the Thames Conservancy about cleaning the channel which runs alongside their premises. They have also referred to the need to provide a minimum flow in the channel throughout the year. The Conservancy have said on a number of occasions that a flow of at least 1 ft will be provided. The Engineer to the Thames Conservancy has indicated that his authority will only maintain the channels to a minimum standard necessary in the interests of land drainage. The Conservancy will not therefore be prepared to cut the banks or clear rubbish from the channel. The King George VI Club have asked if the Council will undertake this service.

Resolved
a) The Borough Surveyor be authorised to clear the stream of rubbish and where necessary keep the stream tidy, &
b) that the Thames Conservancy be urged to provide an adequate flow of water in the stream.

Vol 60 1968-69
page 243, min 869 Flood Relief Scheme
Question raised concerning regular clearance of weed and rubbish in the flood relief channel. Borough Surveyor pointed out that the Council had assisted with this problem although the responsibility rested with the Thames Conservancy.
Resolved that the Borough Surveyor be requested to consult the Thames Conservancy Engineer on this matter immediately.

Vol 61 1969-70
page 148, min 526 Flood Relief Channel Works Committee minutes Nov 1969
Members expressed concern regarding the lack of maintenance of the flood relief channel. The Borough Surveyor had made arrangements for the clearance of rubbish deposited in the channel but the growth of weeds has not been dealt with by the Thames Conservancy.
Resolved :
a) Representations be made to the Thames Conservancy regarding the need for the proper maintenance of the channel.

page 286, min 994 Flood Relief Channels Works Committee minutes March 1970
Town Clerk reported on the legal position regarding responsibility for the maintenance of the banks of the flood relief channels.
Resolved that the Thames Conservancy be asked to accept responsibility for all maintenance works between the boundary fences.

Vol 63 1972-74 [Note: page numbering of this volume is chaotic and there is no index]
page 112 min 406 Works Committee 19 Sept 1972 – York Stream
Member asked that consideration be given to arrangements for the cleansing of York Stream. The Parks Committee provided funds in 1972/3 and 1973/4 for the construction of footpaths and general improvement to York Stream. This work will be carried out on completion of the Library project.

Resolved: that the Borough Surveyor arrange for the removal of rubbish from the section of York Stream from Chapel Arches to the railway embankment.

page 215, min 797 Parks Committee Feb 1973 - York Stream
Details of the cost of landscaping and planting the second phase from York Road to the railway embankment were submitted.
Resolved:
a) Officers be authorised to write to the Thames Conservancy requesting them to clear the stream; *&*
b) that consideration of landscaping and planting adjacent to the stream be deferred until plans are submitted for the development of the old coach station site.

C. FROM OTHER SOURCES

Volume 63 cited above is also the last bound volume of Borough of Maidenhead Minutes. It is impossible to conveniently abstract any information from the subsequent Minutes of the Windsor & Maidenhead District Council (dating from 1973-74) as there is no index. What is known about subsequent problems with water flow and work done to improve it is summarised below. At some point after 1973 the Thames Conservancy became the Thames Water Authority then the National Rivers Authority, now the Environment Agency.

1973: The town centre section of York Stream was cleared of rubbish, the banks grassed and trees planted by the Borough Surveyor and the Parks Committee as part of the new library project (Photo 1[22]).

1975 The Borough obtains a license from the Thames Conservancy division of Thames Water to impede the flow of York road stream by means of a weir at the road bridge in York Road[23]: the object of impounding water by means of the works is to build up approximately 1ft 3in of extra depth for the new Library Garden at the rear of the public library in St Ives Road. Regarding the maintenance of this reach, Thames Water state that it will be cleaned out by a hydraulic machine operating from the stream bank and that it was not their policy to wash or flush silt downstream[24].

1980/82: Thames Water creates a silt bank on the east bank of York Stream immediately south of Ray Mill Road East. Since then this bank was been added to whenever the watercourse was dredged[25]. It has effectively narrowed the watercourse in this section of the stream[26].

1988 June: Problem of lack of water in York Stream first comes to the attention of Thames Water who investigate situation but are unable to ascertain the cause of the low flows. In December they clear the White Brook of fallen trees etc prior to dredging, and say they will

[22] M.Ad. 12 Jan. 1973 p 2 "Much-maligned stretch of water given much needed facelift".
[23] This was not the first weir in this position. In the 19th Century an impounded lake was created in this same reach as an amenity for St Ives Place (see Map 6).
[24] Letter from Thames Water to Peter Nevell, East Berks Ramblers dated 12 Dec 1975. There is no evidence that cleaning of any sort has ever been done.
[25] Letter from David van Beesten (NRA) to Margaret Bowdery (East Berks Ramblers) dated 29 March 1990.
[26] In July 1993 a new bridge for the Green Way was put in place, its east end resting on the dried silt bank. See M.Ad. July 16, p 16.

continue this operation throughout the system over the next 18 months[27]. First reports in the Maidenhead Advertiser[28] expressing concern about the lack of water in the town centre. Lack of flow blamed by Thames Water on dry winters resulting in low groundwater levels and low levels in the Thames.

1989 January: Civic Society attends site visit with Thames Water representative who reports that they had at first thought the problem was due to blockage by fallen trees (arising from the storm in October 1897) but now they don't know. They suspect something has affected the groundwater level. Levels of water in Summerleaze Sailing Lake have been low for some time. Thames Water are studying water levels in wells and bore-holes in the area. In the meantime they will do the following:

- tree trunks have already been cleared from the White brook entrance from the Thames (near Islet Park house)
-currently commencing the digging out the White Brook which is overgrown with reeds.
- will dig out Maidenhead Ditch and York Stream in the summer once the crops have been lifted.[29]

1989 Feb: Town centre section still dry. Press reports say that Thames Water did not know what had caused it to dry. Reported that they had begun digging out the White Brook and that Maidenhead Ditch and York Stream would be dug out during the summer once the oil seed rape crop had been lifted.[30]
September: York Stream Action Group formed[31] to try to resolve problem. This group, which includes amenity groups, council officers and representatives of Thames Water Authority, has met regularly since then and the group is now called the Green Way Working Group.

1990 March: National Rivers Authority (previously the Thames Water Authority) give a talk to the Civic Society about the problem of York Stream, noting that this was likely to be the result of the unusually dry weather conditions particularly in the winter but that the growth of reed had heightened the problem.[32] The speaker also says that increased water extraction is unlikely to have been a contributory cause as there had been no pumping close to the stream. The talk included a video showing the dredging process and reports that the whole of the system north of the town has now been dredged to remove accumulated weed growth.

1990 Oct: Status of water flow report by NRA: Problems derive from fact that flow artificial (not naturally fed) exacerbated by exceptional drought up to April 1990. Difficulties of maintaining water flow increased by 10-year fall in water table to which water abstractions probably a contributory factor. At present an insufficient head of water at Boulters lock is reducing the flow into York Stream. With regard to the additional problem affecting water

[27] Letter from Thames Water to Civic Society 7 Dec 1988. Some dredging of the White Brook had been done in 1987 (David van Beesten pers. comm. 2006)
[28] M.Ad. Dec 30 1988.
[29] Civic Society News, Jan 1989.
[30] M.Ad. Feb 17 1989. Apparently when Maidenhead Ditch was dug the gravel-bed was exposed and water drained through. This appears to be one reason why the EA are reluctant to dredge this ditch. The stream on Maidenhead Moor had its reeds cut but was not dredged (David van Beesten, pers. comm. 2006).
[31] This group originally met at Arco Chemical House adjacent to York Stream. Arco chaired and provided the secretariat for the early meetings.
[32] M.Ad. 23 March 1990 p 6,2 talk by Vin Robinson, NRA, who also noted that he had over the last two years been overseeing a research project to measure the ground water levels and the flow of the stream.

flow - the accumulation of reeds in the streambed - the NRA will make periodic inspections and carry out necessary clearance.[33]

1991: Planning application for the proposed Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme (MWEFA), January 1991 says:

> ***"****Existing channels which pass through the centre of Maidenhead town will be upgraded to offer greater capacity during flood time, whilst their appearance under normal conditions will also be considerably improved"*

Oct 1991: Reported[34] that water levels in Strande Water had fallen.

1992 May: Civic Society hosts a public meeting on "Disappearing York Stream" with speakers from the NRA. Information requested by the Society for the meeting includes a graph showing water abstraction from the Maidenhead Ditch area since the mid-1960s showing increased abstraction from pumping stations at Cookham and Taplow (Graph 1).

1992: Civic Society, in evidence to the public inquiry, while supporting the MWEFA scheme in principle, expresses some reservations relating to possible long-term environmental impacts. In particular, the Society expresses the hope that the inquiry, when studying the hydraulic requirements of the scheme, will address the problem of a possible lack of sufficient water to supply the main river, sweetening flow for the new channel and the White Brook/Maidenhead Ditch/York Stream system. Green Way management plan produced in 1992 includes the aim " *to secure an assured flow of water through the system of streams".*[35]

1993: York Stream still drying out. Suggestion made to connect the stream system at Cookham to the Thames by opening up Marsh Meadow ditch. The NRA undertakes to create such a channel to get more water into the system.

1994: Connection to the Thames at Marsh Meadow completed. Additional work to be carried out by the NRA will be tree clearance along Strand Water.

2002-2005: The stream system again fails to deliver water to Maidenhead town centre[36]. The Environment Agency blame low water table[37], dry winters and summer drought[38]. The failure

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[33] From notes of meeting of York Stream Action Group.

[34] M.Ad. Oct 25 1991.

[35] *The York Stream Green Corridor: a feasibility study* 1992. Colne Valley Groundwork Trust. The earlier report *York Stream Project* 1990, produced by the Windsor and Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group, concentrated on the town centre section of York Stream and includes photos of the stream when it was dry and when full of water in the winter. Both these reports are available in Maidenhead Library.

[36] The Civic Society writes to the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency. The problem of York Stream raised at inaugural meeting of Maidenhead Town Forum in August 2003. Both the Forum and the Green Way Working Group continue to express concern about this problem. Regular progress reports occur in Civic Society Newsletter from then on.

[37] It is worth noting that ground water was studied in a hydrological impact assessment report for Sheephouse Farm Quarry (Lewin, Fryer & Partners Oct 2004). It states that the main groundwater flows are eastwards (from the ridge to the west) and suggests that groundwater flowing from the ridge meets that flowing from the river at different points across the site at different times creating high spots. This may then force greater flows southwards (cites Clappers Stream). It also notes that Maidenhead Ditch is fairly shallow so although it may intercept very high groundwater levels, most of the flow would pass beneath it and on to the Thames. The EA are extending their own study of the groundwater in this area.

coincided with the opening in July 2002 of the MWEFA scheme (called the Jubilee River), which takes water from the same section of the Thames (Cliveden Reach), as the White Brook. The brook feeds into Maidenhead Ditch and then York Stream. Since then, the stream has been dry in the town centre from May/June to November.

From 2002 water had retreated in the summer to north of the flood bund[39] gate located at the west end of the bund (see Map 5). At this point in time the White Brook on Widbrook Common was completely blocked with reeds and silt so that no water could flow[40] whilst ditches near to the river were full of water[41]. The only flow towards Maidenhead came from Strandwater. Clearing of fallen trees (see Photos 2 and 3) and dredging of the White Brook by the Environment Agency (in 2003, 2004 and 2005) and a small amount of dredging of the Marsh Meadow Ditch (2004) has resulted in improved flow in the White Brook so that in the summer of 2005 the stream kept going until near to North Town Moor. In 2005 the town centre section, however, remained without water from June to November except when it had storm drainage in it. No dredging of Maidenhead Ditch has been carried out, though some herbicide spraying of the reeds is said to have been done. If so, it has been ineffective.

Photos 4 and 5 shows reeds in Maidenhead Ditch north of the flood control gate i.e. in the awkward connection mentioned above, whilst Photos 6 and 7 show a section of the Ditch diverted to increase space at the cricket club. The latter photos show the amount of reeds and watercress that has accumulated in this newly created stream from 1998 to 2005.

Future Plans: As far as is known the Environment Agency plan to re-dredge the Marsh Meadow ditch at Cookham at some point but have no current plans to do the same with Maidenhead Ditch. The Royal Borough has been told that the EA plan to re-apply to have Maidenhead Ditch Works deleted from the planning application for the MWEFA scheme. The Civic Society will oppose any such deletion.

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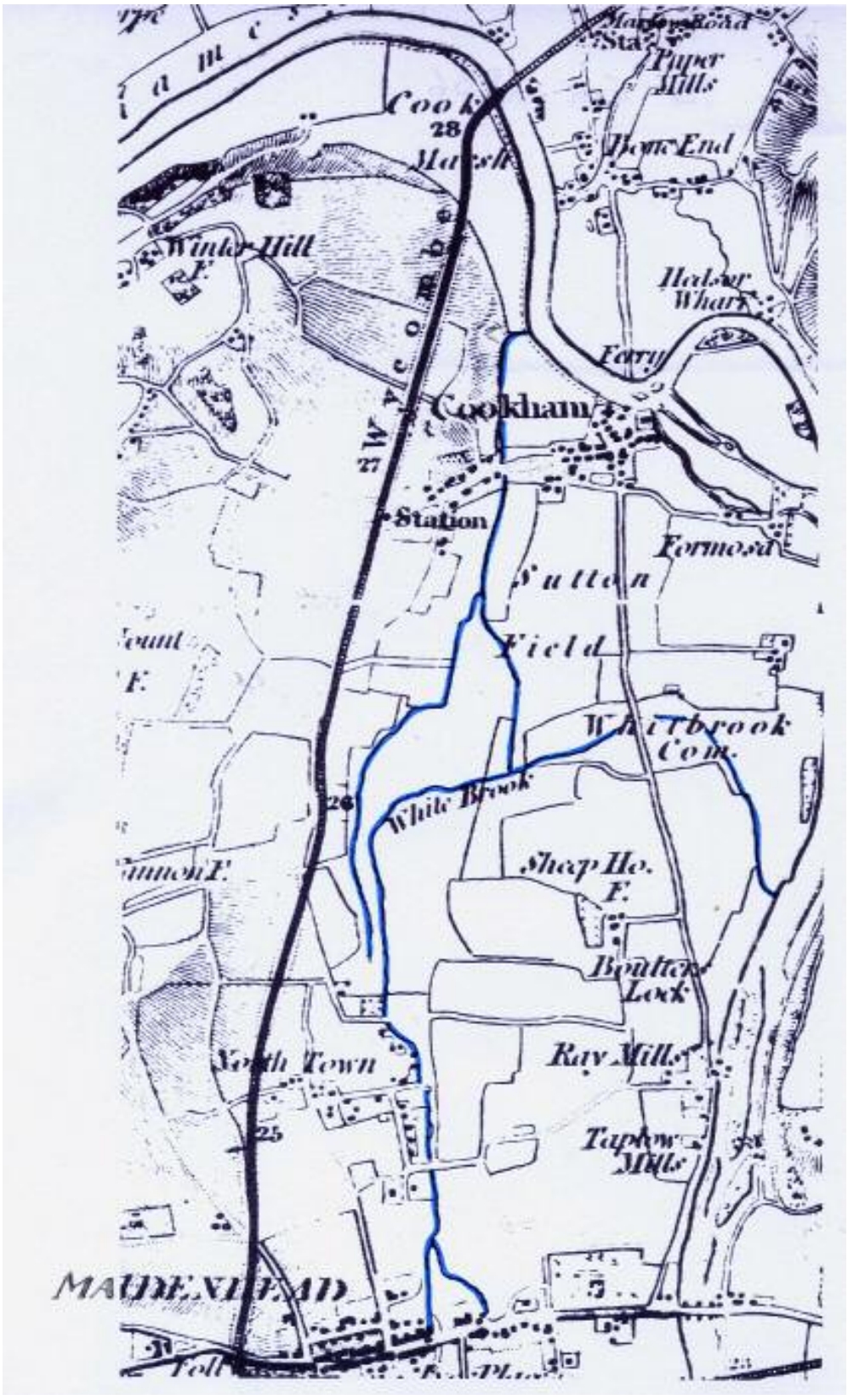
[38] A former Navigation Inspector on the Thames (1960 to 1984) says the problem is maintenance of the White Brook. He comments that years ago the brook was dredged every 3 to 4 years by the Thames Conservancy and their successors the Thames Water Authority and that since the mid 1980s the National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) has not continued this, due, he thought, to cut backs in government grants for such work (M.Ad 2 Aug 2002, p10).

[39] Constructed as part of the flood alleviation scheme.

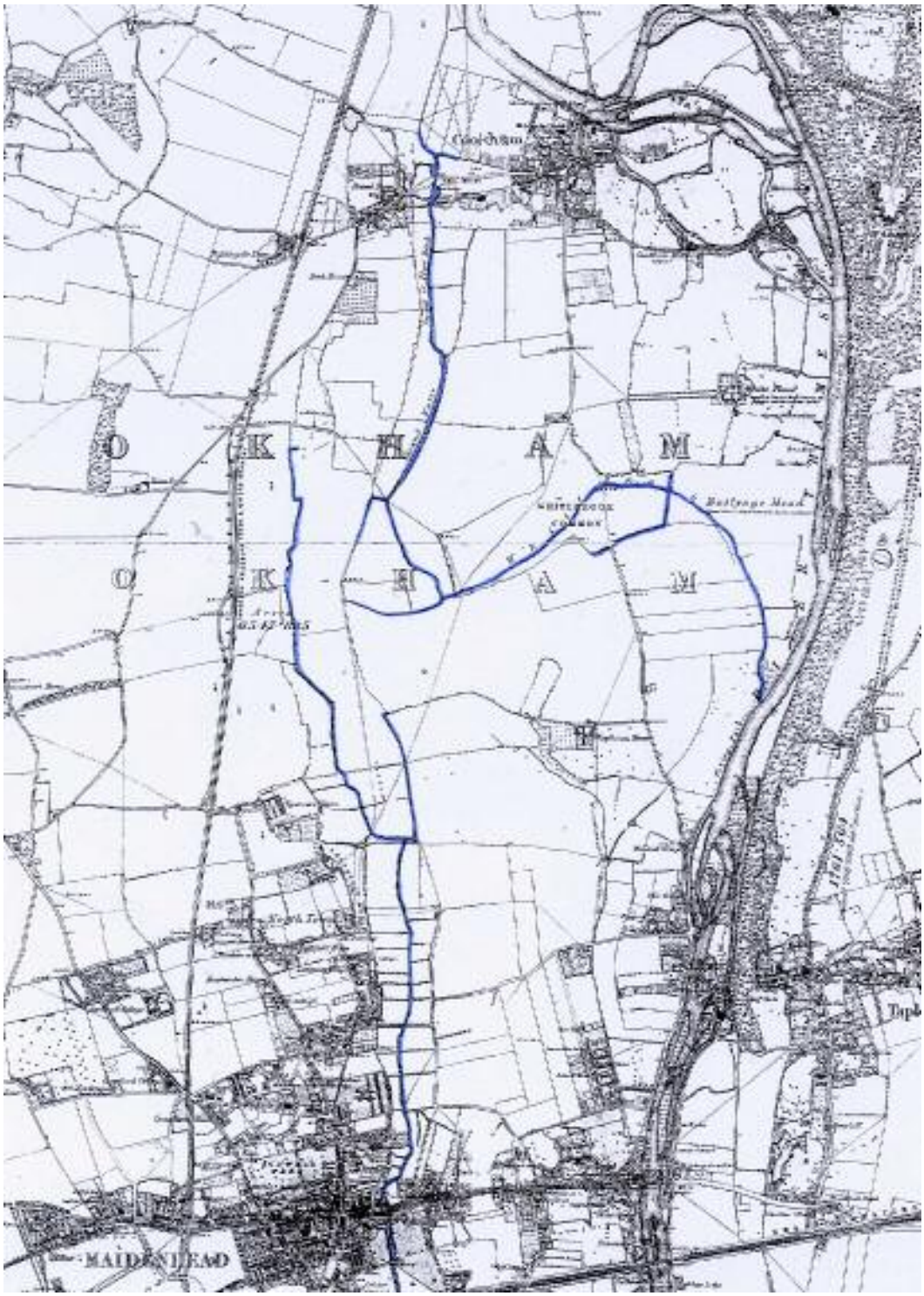
[40] See photo in Civic Society Newsletter April 2003 p 7. A faunal survey of the blocked stream in June 2003 before the dredging started showed species indicative of stagnant water (Civic Society Newsletter July 2003,p6).

[41] Since the White Brook has been dredged these ditches are rarely full of water.

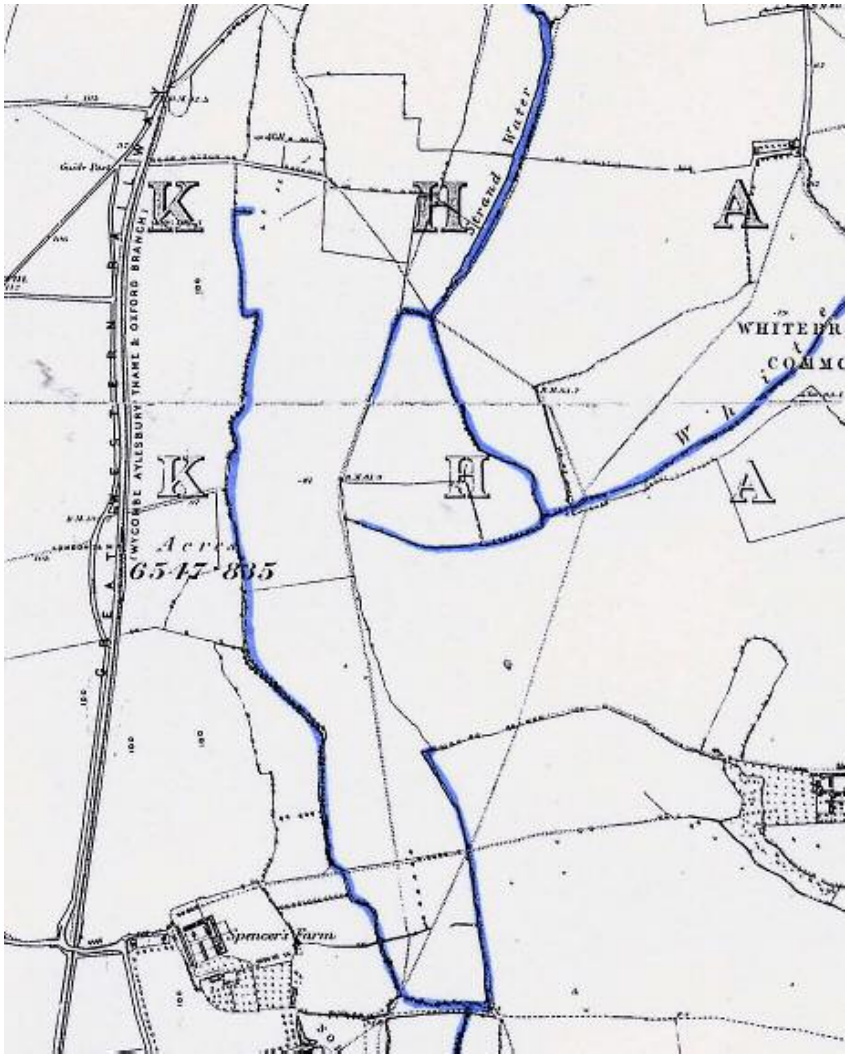
Map 1: Rocque's map, 1761



Map 2: Stream system (in blue) ca 1813

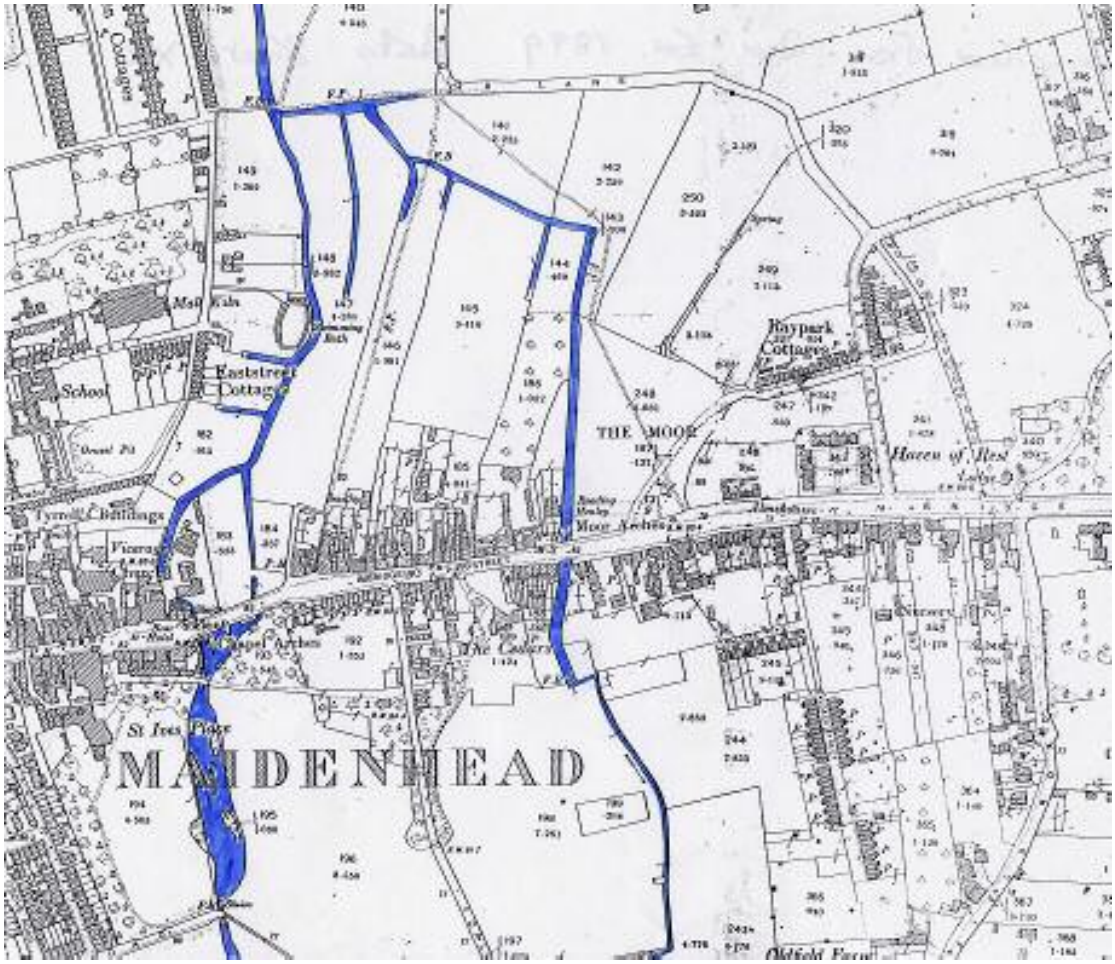


Map 3: Stream system ca 1875



Map 4: Enlargement from Map 3

Map 5: Section of the Green Way map



Map 6: Stream system on Maidenhead Moor ca 1899

Photo 1: York Stream in January 1973, after clearing

Photo 2: The White Brook (near to its junction with the Thames) before tree clearance, January 2004

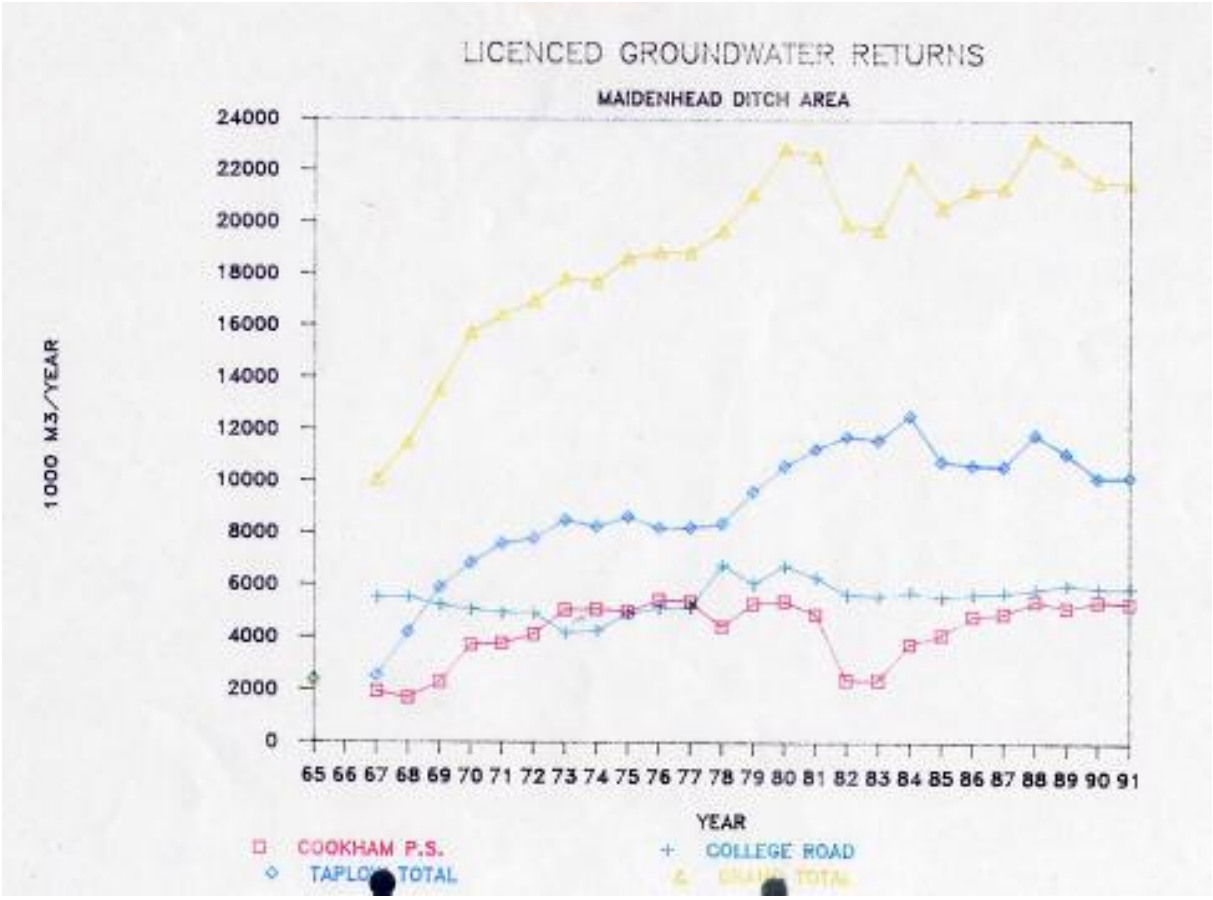
Photo 3: The White Brook after tree clearance and dredging, October 2004

Photo 4: Reeds in Maidenhead Ditch north of the Flood Control Gate, November 2005

Photo 5: Close up of reeds

Photo 6: Newly diverted Maidenhead Ditch near to the cricket club, September 1998

Photo 7: Same section of Maidenhead Ditch, November 2005



Graph 1: Groundwater abstraction in Maidenhead area 1967-91

Acknowledgements

Rocque's map was taken from *A Topographical Map of the County of Berkshire*, 1761, reprinted 1973, Harry Margary, Lympne Castle, Kent.

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Graph of licensed groundwater returns provided by the then National Rivers Authority (NRA).