

# **COLEORTON FISHPOND & BRIDGE AND THE PADDOCK COLLIERY**

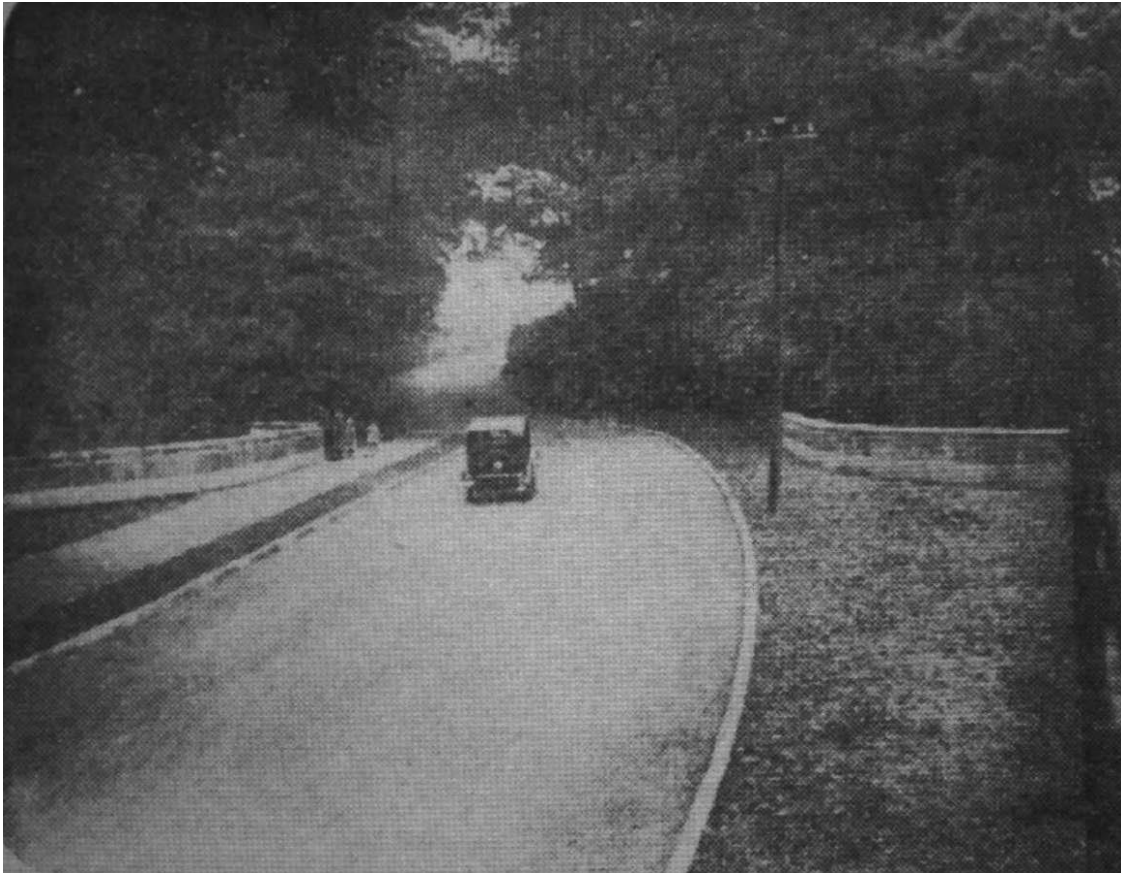


**PHOTOGRAPH OF FISHPOND BRIDGE PRE 1938**

**BY SAMUEL T STEWART – DECEMBER 2021**

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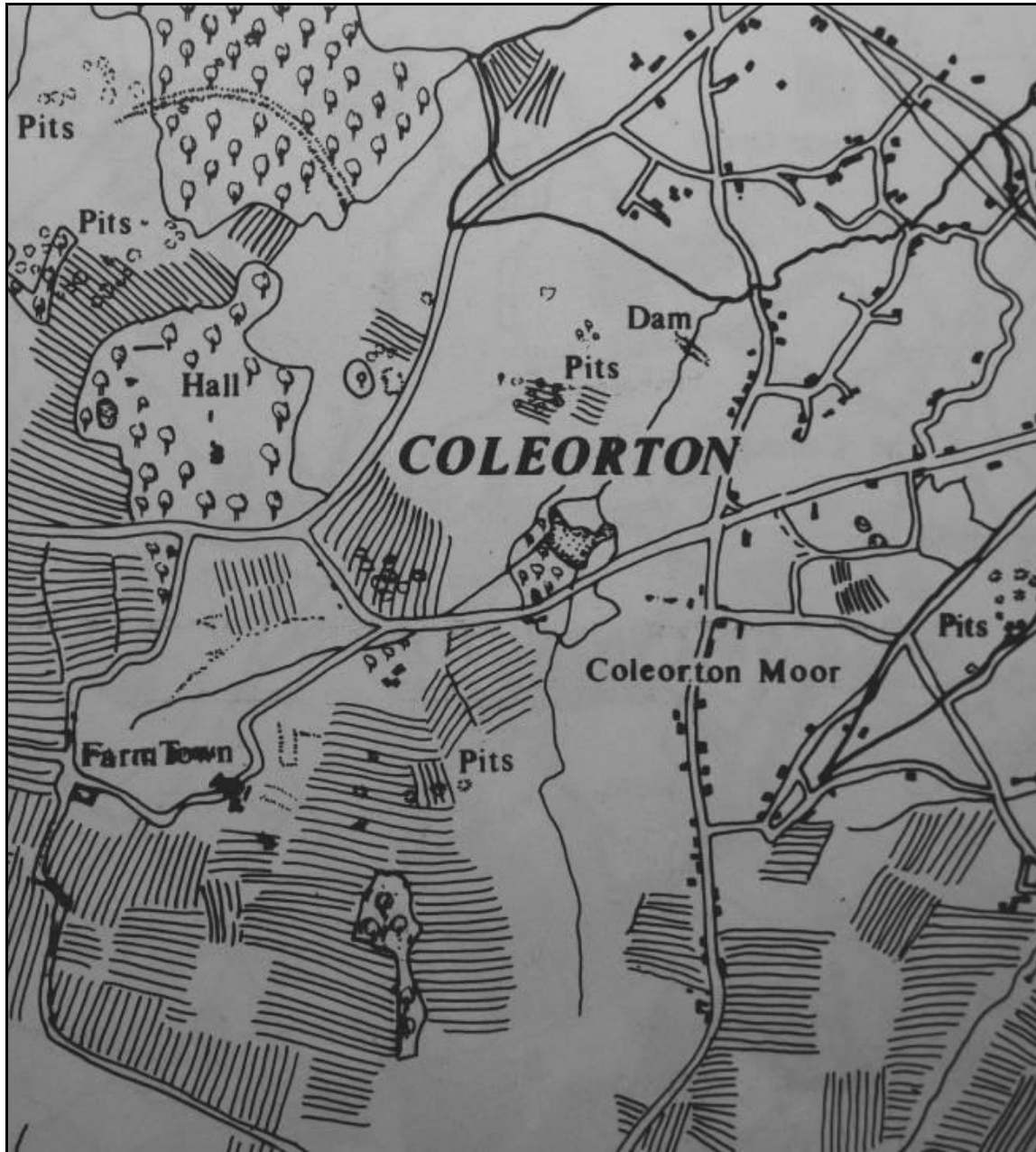


**The new wider road and bridge in August 1939 just following its completion**

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## COLEORTON FISHPOND AND BRIDGE



THE ABOVE MAP IS AN EXTRACT FROM THE LEICESTERSHIRE  
MUSEUMS, ART GALLERIES & RECORDS SERVICES "ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
REPORT No.9. ENTITLED "THE MEDIEVAL EARTHWORKS OF NW  
LEICESTERSHIRE - A SURVEY BY ROBERT HARTLEY"  
PUBLISHED 1984

The plans are drawn on a base of the 6 inch and 25 inch O/S maps surveyed  
in 1881 /2 in order to help in relating them to the network of current roads

Based on the preceding map and other available research information, it has become clear that Coleorton Fish Pond as we know it to day was originally a medieval pond fed by two streams. One from the south of the village running parallel to and west of the Upper Moor Road rising in the area where Coleorton No.3. Colliery (Bug & Wink) was later sunk, and another stream rising in the area of Farm Town, both of which can be clearly discerned on the map.

Ponds have long been valued adjuncts to the Leicestershire landscape, which is almost devoid of natural lakes and has few rivers. In the medieval period, if not before, fish rearing in purpose built ponds became popular, and these fishponds, sometimes of considerable size, became desirable additions to the facilities of monastic sites, manor houses etc.

A stream / brook leaves the pond and flows in a north easterly direction (known in part as Cart Brook) and passes through Gelsmoor / Peggs Green, Griffydam and onwards till it reaches the River Trent, as it would have done for thousands of years. There is a great deal of history attached to this brook in the localities of the Woolrooms and at Griffydam which has been recorded by the author in other publications.

One of the interesting things shown on the archaeological report map is the dam indicated on the brook before it passes under Lower Moor Road. This would have been used to maintain the level of the fish pond, and would no doubt have included a sluice gate of some kind. It is plausible that even in medieval times and in the 18th century the pond would have been used to provide fish for the manor houses at Coleorton.

When the 7th Baronet built the new hall and moved to Coleorton in 1808, landscaping, to improve the view from the hall, would have taken place in the area around the Paddock, and as part of this, the pond would have been dug out to a greater depth and its area increased, to form the fish pond similar to that we know today, in order to provide fish for the table at Coleorton hall and additionally provide boating entertainment for the Beaumonts' and their elite visitors.

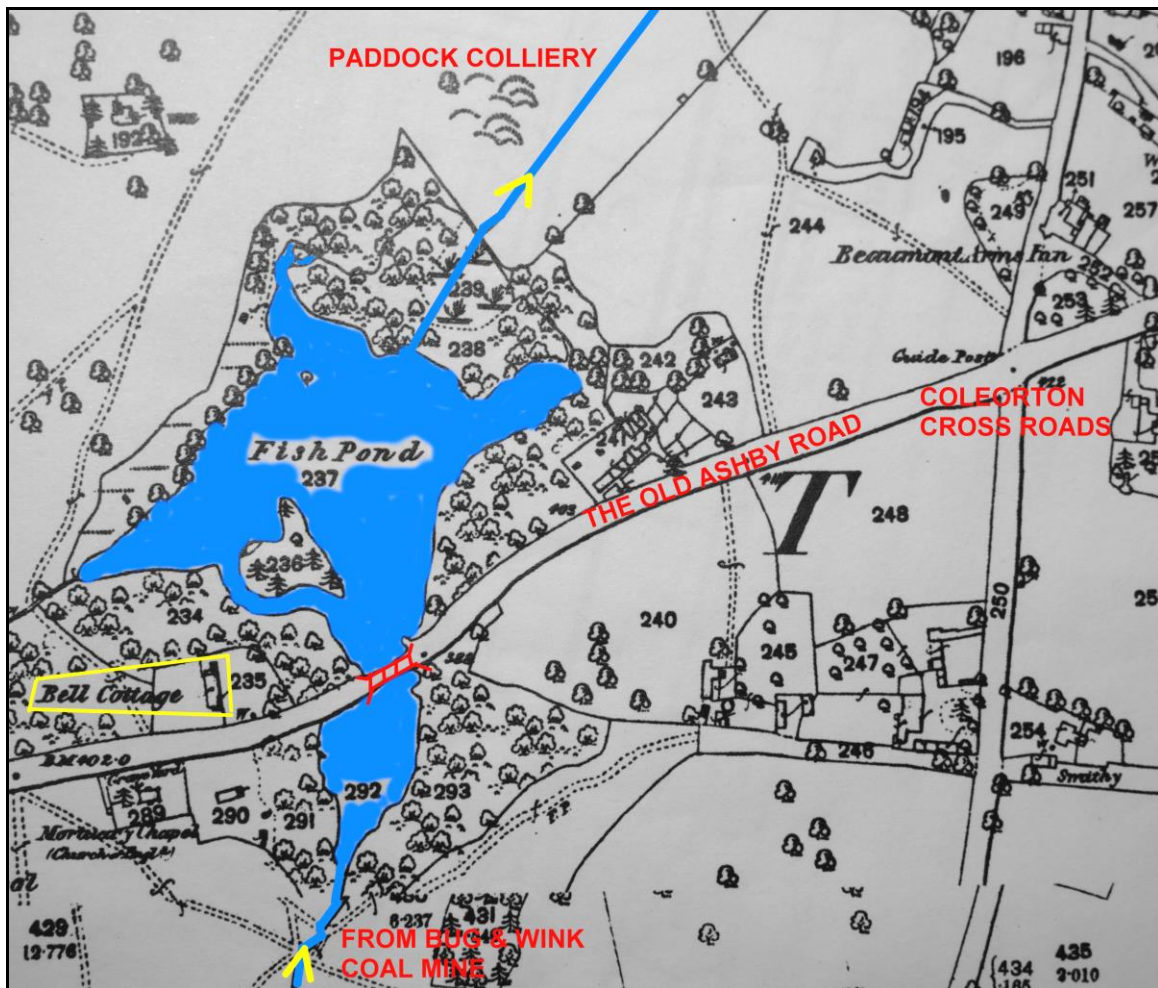
*There is a well worn story, that when the construction of the fishpond was under discussion at the Hall, there was an entire lack of agreement as to the shape the pool should take. William Wordsworth was in residence at the time, and he was reported to have solved the difficulty, by taking up a goblet of wine, and emptying it on the surface of a large table. The shape taken by the liquid as it spread over the table was the shape decided upon for the fishpond.* Bearing in mind that the fishpond had probably been dug out in some form prior to Wordsworth spending time at the Hall, if there is any truth in this story, then it was probably a suggestion for the final shape of the perimeter.

There is some evidence to suggest that balance ponds were created to the south of the fish pond to control the level, and these presumably replaced the dam to the north.

There would have been the need for a bridge of some kind to cross the stream to the south side of the pond but it is likely that this would initially have been a fairly basic single track arrangement and the forerunner of the more substantial sandstone bridge pictured earlier built at some point after the Loughborough to Ashby turnpike had become well established.



**EXTRACT FROM 1881 SURVEYED, 1885 PUBLISHED O/S MAP (annotated by the author)**



The landscape of the area shown in the above 1881 surveyed O/S map is much changed today following the building of the Coleorton by-pass (A 512) to the north of the fish pond in 1992. The old Ashby Road is now only used as an access road off the Upper Moor just south of the re-aligned cross roads, in order to access the remaining houses, school and St. John's Chapel and cemetery. It exits to meet the by-pass at the top of Church Hill with a branch to Farm Town at the bottom of the hill.

The bridge, over the pond pictured earlier, is Grade II listed, and was constructed using locally quarried Coleorton sandstone, with two arches that originally carried the single track turnpike road across the pond. By 1938, the traffic volume and vehicular size, demanded that the road and bridge needed to be widened, and this was completed in August 1939. The bridge was reportedly taken down stone by stone, each one numbered and stored on site. The stones were rebuilt in precisely the same order as they were removed; thus the outside walls of the bridge are the same as they were in the preceding bridge. Two new arches were built, and the arch nearest the cross-roads, was fitted out to serve as a boat house, with mooring rings set in the walls.

Coleorton No.3. Colliery (Bug & Wink) was sunk in 1875, to the south of the pond and apparently the drainage water being pumped out of the pit increased the flow of the existing stream which had the knock on effect of extending the pond well under the bridge at one time as can be seen in the above map. Once the Colliery closed in 1933, the water flow reduced and the level of the pond dropped.

It was recalled by a senior resident of the village, that when the Abel - Smith's were renting Coleorton Hall from the Beaumont Estate from 1901 - 1925, that they used to row their boat right under the bridge. Another boat house was later constructed at the side adjacent to Bell Cottage.

There was a reputed *coaching inn* here called "The Bell Inn", which was demolished in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is identified on the preceding map. The present Bell Cottage is reputed to be part of the old stable block. The reader can learn more about the history of the *Bell Inn* by reading the publication on the author's website entitled "A History of the Bell Inn Coleorton".

### **THE ICE HOUSE**

We know from Beaumont records that when the pond was frozen, ice from there was used in the Hall ice house which was constructed some 100 metres directly south of St. Mary's Church. Evidence of the ice house still remains and a feature on it is included on the author's website.

### **ICE SKATING**

It was reported in the Birmingham Gazette on Monday 7th December 1925 that for the first time in many years many, people are enjoying skating on the large fishpond owned by Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton.

In a report on the skating on ponds in the county, in the Leicester Evening Mail - Friday 14 February 1936, it stated "a good number were skating on the fishpond at Coleorton." It was apparently a particularly cold period.

The writer recalls that in his younger days in the 1950's and 60's, it was a gathering place for the young people of the village. Fishing, ice skating, swimming, rafting and courting were just a few of the activities that took place there. The pond was rented by Ashby Angling Club for a period of time but it is now a private pool, associated with Bell Cottage.



## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON THE BRIDGE COPING STONES

The author was asked for his view on what the reason was for the wrought iron stakes that were inserted into the coping stones along the top of the bridge, as shown in the photographs below:-



Having observed lead locking key plates in the joints of sandstone blocks in a wall surrounding a former mill pond at Staunton Harold to prevent movement of the blocks, the author has concluded the following:-

These rectangular flat "L" shaped metal stakes / locking plates were inserted down oversize rectangular holes in the coping stones which matched similar holes in the row of the large sandstone blocks below. When the locking plates had been inserted down

the holes, molten lead was poured into the gaps around the plates thereby locking the coping stones to the row of large blocks below. There is ample evidence of exposed lead around the tops of the locking plates which people over the years have made their marks in.

If, as reported, the walls of the bridge were re-built stone by stone in the same order, then considerable heat must have been applied to melt the lead surrounding the locking key plates in order for them to be removed. The author leans towards the view that the coping stones and blocks held together by the locking plates would have been removed as one.

**Leicester Daily Post - Monday 25th June 1917**

### **ASHBY-DE-LA-ZOUCH PETTY SESSIONS**

#### **A SALUTARY LESSON**

Herbert Fairbrother (16) and Lakin Stinson (15), colliers, were summoned for committing willful damage to a bridge (the bridge over the fish pond at Coleorton) to the amount of £1 - They pleaded guilty.

Mr. J. F. Jesson, the estate agent, who prosecuted, said a considerable amount had been spent in the repair of the bridge and **defendants were caught with a hammer and chisel removing the lead from between the copings to make leads for fishing lines.**

Wm. Walker, a tenant, said a considerable amount of damage had been done, and P.C. Sibson estimated it at £6.

**The Chairmen said it was a serious matter, and defendants were fined £1 12s. 6d. each or 14 days.**



**THE DARKER SIDE OF  
COLEORTON FISH POND**



## **DROWNINGS AND ACCIDENTS IN COLEORTON FISH POND**

**Leicester Chronicle – July 7<sup>th</sup> 1837**

**Another death by drowning** – On Saturday, the 1<sup>st</sup> inst., three sons of the Rev. James Merewether (*brother of the Rev. Francis Merewether presumably*), accompanied by a cousin who had come from Essex on a visit to the family, went to fish in a pond, commonly called the reservoir (*presumably Coleorton Fish Pond*), in the lordship of Coleorton. In the evening, Charles George Merewether went into the water to bathe, and his brother Lewis (*should be spelt Louis*) expressed a wish to follow him. The third brother, Henry Robert, objected to it, unless he would have a rope round his body; but the youth, without taking this precaution, shortly afterwards jumped into the pond, having undressed without the knowledge of Henry, who was only aware of the fact when he heard him splash into the water. Perceiving that his brother struggled, and then sank, Henry, although he could swim but little sprang in to his assistance. His efforts unfortunately were to no avail; his brother never rose, and he could not reach him under water. Meanwhile an alarm had been given by the cousin; and Joseph Doughty, a Blacksmith, hastened to the pond, and, after undressing, jumped in, and succeeded in finding the body. At the spot where it was found, there were many weeds, in which the Blacksmith got entangled, but he could not say whether the body was entangled in like manner. Three quarters of an hour having elapsed from the time the youth sank until he was taken out, life was quite extinct. – An inquest was held on Monday at Coleorton: **Verdict, “Accidental Death”**.

**Leicester Journal - Friday 6th October 1854**

### **Drowning at Coleorton**

On Saturday last, the body of a female named Ann Mitchell, 76 years of age, was found in the fish-pond at Coleorton. The deceased had a short time previously left the house of her grandson, with whom she resided, in her usual moral health and spirits. No opinion could be formed as to whether the occurrence was the result of an accident, or whether there was any intention on the part of the deceased to commit self-destruction.

**Leicester Chronicle – February 9<sup>th</sup> 1856**

**Coleorton** – As a number of boys were last Saturday amusing themselves upon the ice, upon a pond belonging to Sir G. H. Beaumont, a lad about twelve years old broke in, where the water was more than six feet deep; He supported himself by holding on about three quarters of an hour, his brother having thrown him a rope. The poor fellow cried out most piteously, but the bystanders on the bank, durst not venture to approach him. A loud cry of distress was raised by the spectators, which was fortunately heard by a man residing in the village, named James Walker, who was going to the Ashby Market, and was half a mile off, who immediately ran towards the spot, and on reaching it, he seized a rope, and without hesitation went towards the boy; but although he had the precaution to crawl upon the ice, it broke when he was within three or four yards, and the poor little fellow had lost his hold, and gone down twice. His gallant deliverer swam towards him, and seized him as he held up his bleeding hands, which were lacerated by the ice, and succeeded in conveying him towards the land, where he was loudly cheered. The boy was in a state of unconsciousness, and Walker gently laid him upon the ground, and inflated his lungs with air, by blowing down his throat. The poor little sufferer was

immediately conveyed to the house of his father. Mr. John Davenport, relieving officer of the district, and Mr. Orton, surgeon, being speedily in attendance, animation was quickly restored. It is hoped that the noble self devotion of Mr. Walker, who saved the child's life at the imminent risk of his own, will be both rewarded and remembered. He is a travelling hawker (pot seller?), of good character, and has a young wife and family dependant on his exertions.

**Nottingham Evening Post - Thursday 19th June 1879**

**SUICIDE BY DROWNING AT COLEORTON, LEICESTERSHIRE.**

[As the newspaper refers to Coleorton and the inquest was held at the George, it is assumed that the drowning was in Coleorton Fish Pond](#)

On Monday, Mr. Deane, County Coroner, held an inquest at the George inn, Coleorton, concerning the death of a man known as "Frank," but whose name was Francis Shrives, aged 45. The deceased was found drowned in a pond by man named Thomas Whyman.—Eliza Posnett stated that her husband, John Posnett, kept the Fox inn, at Thringstone. The deceased had lodged at their house since November last. gave the name of "Frank," and she did not know him by any other name until very recently. He came to work at Mr. Mann's as bricklayer's server, and was five weeks in this employ, when he went to the South Leicestershire Colliery as a banksman. He had often asked deceased where his home was and if he had wife, and he said he was not married and had worked as a brushmaker for seven years in Leicester. Some time in the early part of the year deceased joined a money club, and gave the name of Francis Shrives. He seemed very quiet on the 6th of June, and she asked him if he did not feel well, and he replied, don't feel well at all; I feel so bad at my chest." Sunday morning, the 8th, about four o'clock her husband was awakened by his son, who slept in the same room as the deceased, and on going there the door was found to be fastened inside. Deceased was walking about with open knife in his hand. Deceased let the boy out and fastened the door again, remaining in the room until between seven and eight o'clock, when Mr. Mann was fetched by witness's husband. Deceased was asked to open the door, but he refused, saying there were a lot waiting for him. Mrs. Mann and her husband broke the door open, and found deceased looking very wild, and he said, "shall do my best if you want me." They suggested to him that he should take a walk and he would feel better, and they took him across two fields, when deceased left them. He was brought back by John Hall at a little after two o'clock. At half-past two deceased was asked to lie down, but said he should go for walk. left and never returned.—James Wardle stated that he went in search of deceased, and found him in a field Osgathorpe with an open knife in his hand. He looked very wild and refused to come home, saying there was a bother, and he might have done something. There was a town's talk about him.—Thomas Whyman deposed to seeing something in the pond on Monday week. It was a dog or cat. Witness went to the field again on Sunday last, and some girls stated that there was a man in the pit. He went and saw that it was the body of a man which had previously been mistaken by him for a cat or dog's body.—James Bradley, of Thringstone, said he knew Frank, who lodged at Posnett's. Heard a week last Sunday that was not himself, and went to him at the canal side, at Osgathorpe. He looked very wild, and witness said, "Come, Frank, back with me," to which he replied, " No, Jim, shan't go back today. going in this water, and the first man that comes up to me I'll run this knife in him up to the hilt." Deceased pulled knife out of his pocket and opened it. Witness told him must not talk so.

no one wanted to hurt him, and said he was sure there was; they had been watching and peeping after him all the morning. He also said, "The next time you see me, you see me drowned here," pointing to the water. He would not go home, and witness left him. Deceased seemed to be a well-educated man.—The jury returned verdict that deceased drowned himself whilst in an unsound state of mind.

**The Nottingham Evening Post - Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1901**

### **THE DROWNING OF A CHILD AT COLEORTON**

Mr. H. Deane, coroner for north Leicestershire, last evening held an enquiry at "The Beaumont Arms", Coleorton, as to the drowning of Joseph Wright Fairbrother. – The mother of the child, Sarah. E. Fairbrother, stated that he was seven years old. On Saturday afternoon the child went out to play with others, and witness saw him near the fishpond at five o'clock. – Sarah Ann Fairbrother, 11 years old sister, said the deceased undressed and went into the pond with other children. He walked about and the water came up to his head, and he suddenly sank. Witness called out to him, but he was unable to answer, although he came to the surface again. Witness became frightened and ran home to her mother. – Abraham Willet, coal miner, deposed to finding the body, about six or seven yards from the bank, and where there was depth of four feet of water. – **The jury returned a verdict of "accidentally drowned whilst bathing"**.

**Leicester Daily Post - Monday 15th October 1917**

### **SWANINGTON Collier Found Drowned**

Aaron Whyman, 60, a collier of this place, who had been missing from his home since Friday, has been found drowned in a pond in the parish of Coleorton.

**Leicester Chronicle - Saturday 7th July 1928**

### **DROWNED IN FISH POND. Tragic Death of a Coleorton Newsagent. ILL HEALTH.**

Stating that he was going to the cricket match, Ernest Henry Fewkes, newsagent, of Coleorton left home and failed to return. His body was found in Coleorton Fish Pond. At the Inquest, it was stated that he suffered from ill health and failing eye sight. He had been missing from home previously, and had left a note behind, in which there was a rambling statement. His health, however, had somewhat improved of late. Mr. Deane (the Coroner) said some people would say that Fewkes was out his mind, but as a judicial officer he could not say there was absolutely clear evidence of mental instability.

**Leicester Evening Mail - Wednesday 30th June 1943**

Thomas Herbert Platts, aged 37, miner of The Bungalow, Coleorton Moor, is reported missing from home. He left home saying he was going to work, but he did not arrive at colliery. A note was found by the side of Coleorton fishpond where the police are now making a search. *The body was found later.*



**Leicester Evening Mail - Wednesday 19th July 1944**

### **COLEORTON GIRLS VAIN BID TO SAVE BROTHER**

A VERDICT of accidental death was recorded by Mr. Henry Deane, North Leicestershire Coroner, at an inquest at Coleorton yesterday on Robert Donaldson Thomson (17), drowned in the fishpond on Sunday while swimming with his sister. James Hough, of Grove Cottage, Main Street, Swannington, miner, said he was fishing in the pond. He saw a young man and a young woman bathing. They were playing with a log in the water.

Then I heard a shout, and saw only the lady in the water, with her head showing about 50 or 60 yards from the bank. It appeared she had just come up from under the water.

He took his clothes off and dived in as he could not see the young man. The witness said he was not a particularly good swimmer, and it was about 18 years since he had been in the water. He got into difficulties because of duck weed and his underclothes wrapped around his legs, and he was unable to reach the girl.

### **GETTING TIRED**

Jesse Walker Cassidy Thompson, a nurse at "Ashby Cottage Hospital", living with her parents and her brother at "Outwoods' Farm Cottage", Coleorton, said "that with her brother she arrived at the fish pond for a swim. She was a fairly good swimmer and could dive, but her brother was not so good.

"The last I saw of my brother was when he was paddling the water with his hands. He then went under. I think he was getting tired, we had been in the water about 20 minutes" she said.

"I think he was a bit excited, he called "Jessie, Jessie," and I realised he was in difficulties. As I made for him he went under before I could reach him. I managed to catch hold of his costume, but he was struggling with me and he was dead weight. I tried to turn him on his back, but he was dragging me down all the time. He brother let go when they were face to face and she went down with him.

"I called for help, and seeing bubbles, I dived after him and stayed to tread the mud, but could not find him, and I was afraid and a bit demented. He was a hefty chap and would not let me go, clinging his arms around me" she said.

Questioned as to weeds, she said : "I am afraid I had no hand for feeling weeds : it was just a body I wanted."

### **CORONER'S HINT**

The coroner said the boys sister made a very gallant attempt to save her brother's life, assisted as far as possible by Mr. Hough.

He suggested that it might be a good thing if young people were not only taught to swim, but also to practice life saving, as they never knew when they might be called upon to give assistance to friends and strangers.

## PADDOCK COLLIERY

Please refer to the preceding map which indicated its approximate location.

The following in italics' is taken from the "North West Leicestershire Mining Heritage Trail" publication :-

*Paddock Colliery was an important mine in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It mined high quality coal and used the latest technology of the day, including atmospheric steam pumps. The shrub covered mounds visible today, are the remains of the dirt tips, and down towards the brook, stood the main pumping engine.*

The author believes that this mine was operated by Joseph Boulton and leased from Sir George Beaumont. In the judicial reviews of the bitter Beaumont v Boulton court case, it refers to a colliery being established on "Coleorton Field", and the narrative suggests that this was Paddock Colliery.