

Ponds and moat 2003

In the Spring the water levels in the ponds and the moat were high. We needed the float to get to the island when the BTCV group came in February – the shallowest part was then about a foot deep. The second pond slightly overflowed the dam when at its highest level. At times water flowed from the moat into the first pond.

The hot and dry summer and autumn resulted in the loss of water through evaporation and transpiration; some water probably soaking into the banks as the soil dried out. The moat level fell to well below the re-puddled area on the SE corner and eventually the moat became almost totally dry though still deeply muddy in much of the bottom. The ponds also dried out totally though remaining muddy.

Both ponds are recovering / refilling well but the moat is refilling slowly; at the start of Jan. 04 the water has not yet met right round the moat. The dry conditions have revealed the vast number of leaves (especially sycamore) which collect in the moat each year and the presence of partly decayed leaves from previous years.

In terms of plant life the vegetation in the ponds seems to be recovering. In pond 1 the hornwort seems to be present as before and the marginal plants seem to have survived. It is worth noting that the flag iris have not got out of hand in this pond. In pond 2 the dry conditions enabled some of the flag iris particularly on the dam side of the pond to be removed – in this pond they have grown too prolifically and threatened to fill the pond completely. The shallow conditions may have particularly suited them but is there also a difference in the nutrients available in the sediments in the two ponds? As very little grows in the moat water could the overflow into pond 1 be a factor? None of the aquatic plants such as hornwort have survived in the moat although there are some marginals growing at present - could this be due to greater oxygenation after drying out or will they die as the water levels rise?

The vegetation on the bank around the moat has been cut hard back this autumn / winter (2003) including saplings and brambles; this is in accordance with the agreement with English Heritage. The vegetation on the banks around the ponds has also been cut back and a couple of overhanging branches removed from the edge of pond 2.

Some rushes in the wet flush area near the board walk were cut hard back last winter and another area will be done early in 2004. However the whole area is dominated by willow herb which seed very easily – this is appropriate to such a wet area but may need some management to prevent it seeding so much next autumn.

WEJ

NB – the invasive 'flag iris' mentioned in pond 2 was later identified as Acorus or sweet flag not the yellow flag iris