

'The Lakes' glory has departed

BUT ANOTHER ERA COULD BE WAITING AROUND THE CORNER

"Echo" Staff Reporter

BIT by bit Old Southampton is vanishing—and not only in the town centre. The demolition men are now dismantling Lake Cottage, Winchester-road, the quaint, formerly thatched, fascinating home that once had a lake lapping its foundations on either hand.

Probably only those living in the vicinity know this spot in the corner of Winchester-road and Warren-avenue, tucked away in a hollow.

Once upon a time artists came to paint the scene and were delighted with its charm.

CONFINED TO A CULVERT

Shirley Pond still guards the cottage on the Warren-avenue side, but on the other the big lake which once provided water for the old Royal Mail laundry has gone—filled in, with a modern cycle speedway track laid out in one corner and water confined to a huge culvert running beneath.

One end of Lake Cottage gazes to the sky; at the other end the

Winter, and mother made it into a lovely spot—and there was obvious regret at the passing not only of a decade, not of a generation, but of a century or more of happy occupation.

Mrs. Budd's grandfather, Mr. Frederick Bowles, was living at the Lakes at the turn of the century and then the Winters lived there. Mr. Winter bought the place in 1923.

Lake Cottage was once owned by a Mr. W. V. Cotton, a Southampton business man, who lived in Trafalgar House, overlooking the ponds and still standing. He rented the cottage to the Bowles.

About 100 years ago a somewhat eccentric character lived in Lake Cottage, a Mr. William Brown Baker. He used to go to bed each night in his coffin.

pounder from the stream. "I used to fish in the rain with a worm," he said. There were lampreys there, too.

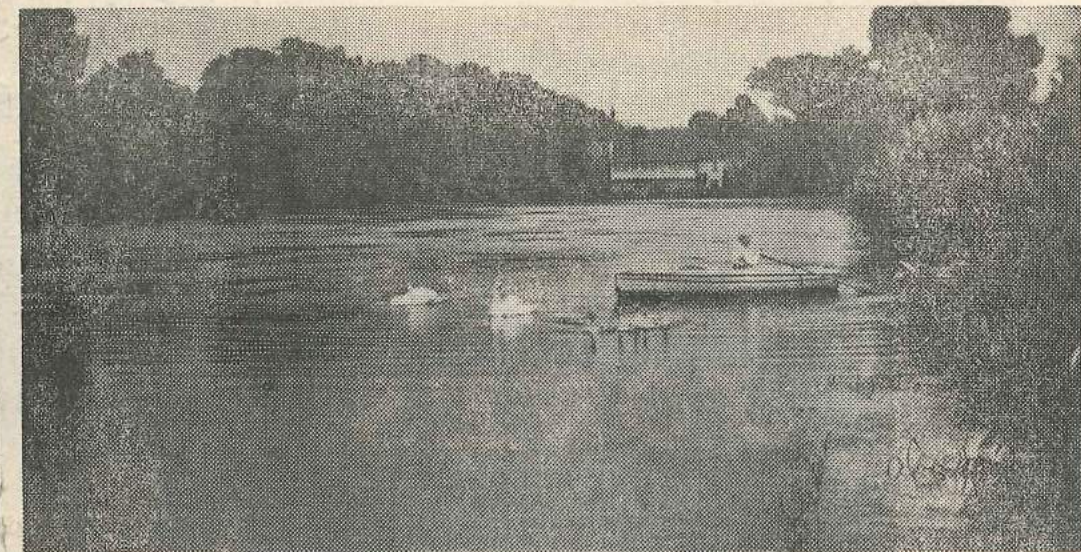
Today . . . look at the trickle of discoloured water, with its foreign bodies and rusty appearance—and weep.

RECORD PIKE WAS THERE

Shirley Pond—it was bigger in those days, going right up to the house and extending further towards Warren-avenue.

It was a good fishing lake—there is a record of a 29lb. pike being taken there, Mr. Bowles told me.

There are still fish there—carp and tench, some roach and perch and eels.



In the 'Twenties the second pond at Shirley, on the other side of Lake Cottage, was an attractive place. Here is a photograph taken in the 'Twenties, complete with rowing boat and swans.

But the lake is silting up. Later, it will be covered with white and yellow water lilies. There will be several clear patches and Mr. Bowles reckons those are where the bombs fell on one memorable night in 1940.

Mrs. Budd recalls that night when some 20 people were sheltering in the cottage. It is thought that three bombs fell in the lake—two exploding and the third failing to do so.

"Next morning, hundreds of big eels were found floating on top of the lake, stunned," she said. Workmen putting up the dragon's teeth (the tank traps)—which, incidentally, are still there after all these years, peering through the undergrowth like denizens of another world—collected the eels in buckets.

At the beginning of the war, after the raids, a lot of debris was dumped at the house end of the pond (chiefly broken glass) and the land reclaimed.

MEMORIES OF AN ICE HOUSE

Years ago, The Lakes was ablaze with wild daffodils. "It

was a wonderful place, beautifully kept. Sitting in the windows, and looking out over the other pond, was like being in a boat," Mr. Bowles recalled.

That pond, now filled in, supplied the water for the laundry, as stated. "As a boy I worked in the laundry, and one job was to get into the big water storage tanks and chip away the corrosion."

Just above Shirley Pond is an inn called the Ice House. That is no chance name.

Years ago there was an ice "house" nearby. Mr. Bowles recalls: "There was a huge cavern near where the Ice House now stands. Ice taken from the lake in the winters (which must have been hard) was stored there. It was a dark and gloomy place, and as a boy I used to peer in to see all the ice and water. We used to say we would not like to fall in there."

The ice was sold to shipping companies.

There is little doubt that both the lake and the former one now filled in were connected with old Shirley Mill (commemorated in Old Mill-way nearby), and were reserve water supplies, probably.

Those were the days when

Tanners Brook and Holly Brook were different indeed.

THE LOOK FORLORN

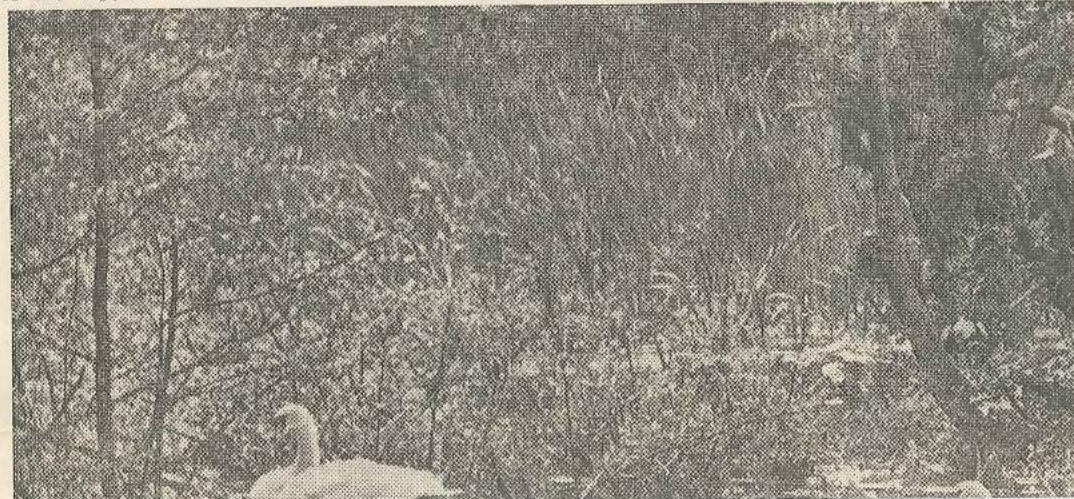
Today the lake is matted with toppled trees and screened by a tanglewood of branches. Yet it is still very pleasant in the sunshine. The swans nest every year—the birds are now brooding their eggs. The giant reed mace grows there; it is quite a bird sanctuary.

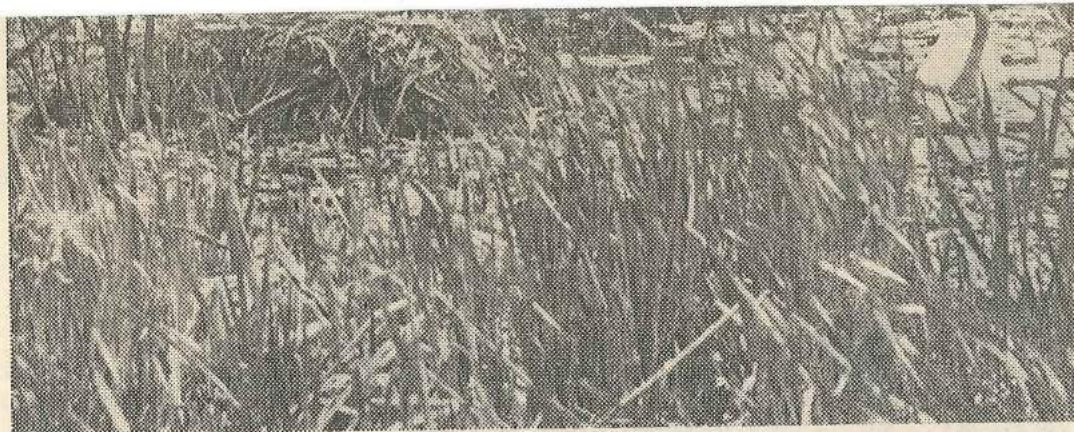
What a picturesque spot it was—as the old photographs show. What a delightful spot it could be again. But now there is a forlorn look, with a tumbledown summer-house, gates old and off their hinges, nettles growing, reeds thick to the water's edge.

I disturbed an old black cat sunning in the thick greenness.

Mr. and Mrs. Evans will be sorry to go for many reasons, although obviously Lake Cottage (or part of it) had its limitations in the sixties. Mr. Evans will remember his quiet bits of fishing from outside his front door.

But perhaps, just around the corner, is a new era for the lake; let's hope so.





Quiet haven, with main road traffic a few wing-beats away. The swans enjoy the May sunshine on the lake—one sitting patiently, the other keeping careful watch amid the reeds.—"Echo" photo.



Forty years ago this is how Lake Cottage appeared on a summer's day, with a little boat tied by the steps in front of the cottage.

tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Evans, move out very shortly.

The quince tree is gay with faintly pink blossom; the clematis is riotously awry; the oaks are pale green in the sunshine, but the dead hand of neglect and decay lies over the Lakes (as it was sometimes called).

It is really no one's fault. The war, and then Southampton Corporation's laudable desire to have green and pleasant places preserved for all time

Lake Cottage is being pulled down following the owners' acceptance of a demolition order made by the Medical Officer of Health on the grounds of unfitness.

The site is owned by four sisters—Mrs. G Budd, a widow, of Warren-avenue; Mrs. F. Smith, of Laundry-road; Mrs. D. Hillyer, of North Baddesley; and Mrs. M. Henvest, also a widow, of Cox-ford-road—and and Mrs. E. Winter, widow of their brother, Mr. Arthur Winter.

The present home of Mrs. Budd and Mrs. Winter is so close to the lake that they can see it many times a day.

MADE IT INTO LOVELY SPOT

"It was my home," Mrs. Budd told me. "My father, Mr. George

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One night the coffin turned over and Mr. Baker was found by his housekeeper pinned beneath it.

Apparently there used to be high old times on the lakes when they were frozen hard in the sixties and seventies of last century. Many years ago a very old inhabitant used to recall a post in the middle of one of the lakes. It was called "the grey mare," and with swivel attachment provided an ice round-about, a very popular form of amusement.

MAY BECOME OPEN SPACE

But to return to the present. Southampton Corporation are interested in acquiring the land to complete a sweep of open space called the Crescent.

On the other side of Warren-avenue they own an area, once a boggy wood, now filled in to a depth of 15ft. with refuse and grassed.

The local authority own the filled-in lake on the other side of Lake Cottage, and then The Crescent will run along the Tanners Brook valley to Olive-road, cross over to the other side where there is a tip, round to Cox-ford allotments and through to Aldermoor - road—a magnificent sweep of open space in an area now very largely built over.

So the lake is an important part in the chain—and would be a delightful link if landscaped.

Holly Brook meanders down underground to pop up by the side of the pond. It disappears into the big culvert and eventually joins Tanners Brook and runs into the Test.

Now Mr. F. G. Bowles, retired master chef, of Romsey-road, a grandson of Mr. Frederick Bowles, has many happy memories of the lake and of Holly Brook.

The brook was deeper and clearer and not so overgrown years ago. It held trout—once Mr. Bowles took a beautiful 14-



A view across the lake, showing the tree-screened cottage, now partly gaping to the sky.—"Echo" photo.