

## POND RESTORATION a personal account

John Peck and Jo Reid

When we bought Felin Hescwm there was no pond on the plan which was taken faithfully from the Ordnance Survey map. There was an old wall holding up the field, but we thought nothing of it. The one remaining leat, of the two original ones, wandered through the field forking near the end. One branch ended in a bog by the wall above the wrecked waterwheel, while the other came through the wall to cascade down into the old wheel-pit of the demolished second mill. The wall was wrecked in places by big willows growing in it. Imagine our excitement when we looked at the 1905 Ordnance Survey map left by the previous owner and found the pond, realising that the wall was the old dam.



*Extracts from (left) recent OS map; (right) 1905 OS map.*

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We didn't get the pond excavation grant funded. Also, although Capps & Capps were great restoration builders, they didn't know a thing about dams, and as for the architect . . . suffice it to say he signed the job off with the dam leaking like a sieve! We discovered that as clients we had no rights whatsoever. Luckily for us, Bob, the partner for Capps & Capps in charge of our little job, took responsibility and voluntarily extended the snagging period to two years. The plans and sections show the three stages of repair. Stage IV is landscaping, and Stage V is in the next section.

Points to remember: If you have a dam filled with rubbish and it is perched close above your mill, you will need clay fillets, made of good uniform pebble-free clay. Blue Lias seems to be the best. When you are doing fillets from scratch you will need two goes, with a few years in between. This is because, however hard your digger compacts the clay, it will continue to compact and sink with time and water pressure and will need the second layer.

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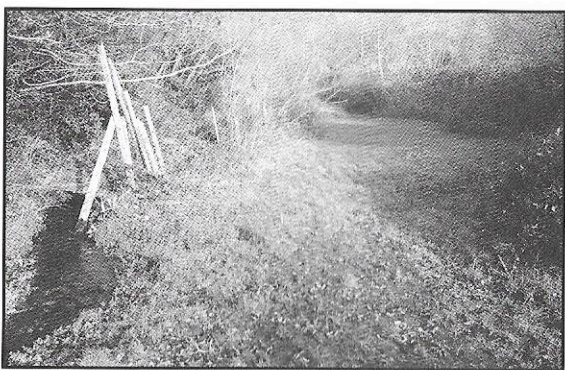
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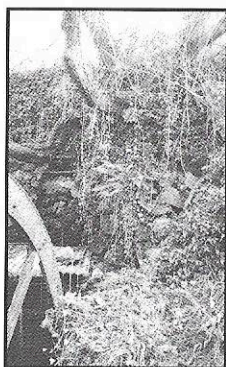
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The old pond completely silted up



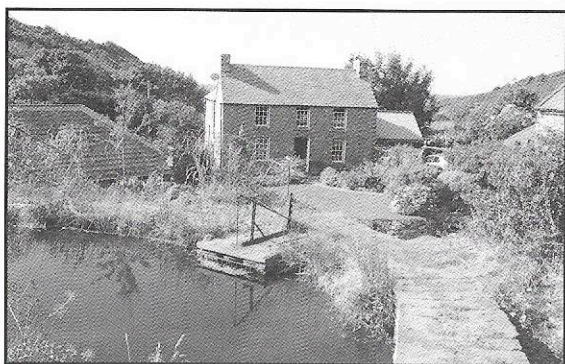
Dam ruined by willows



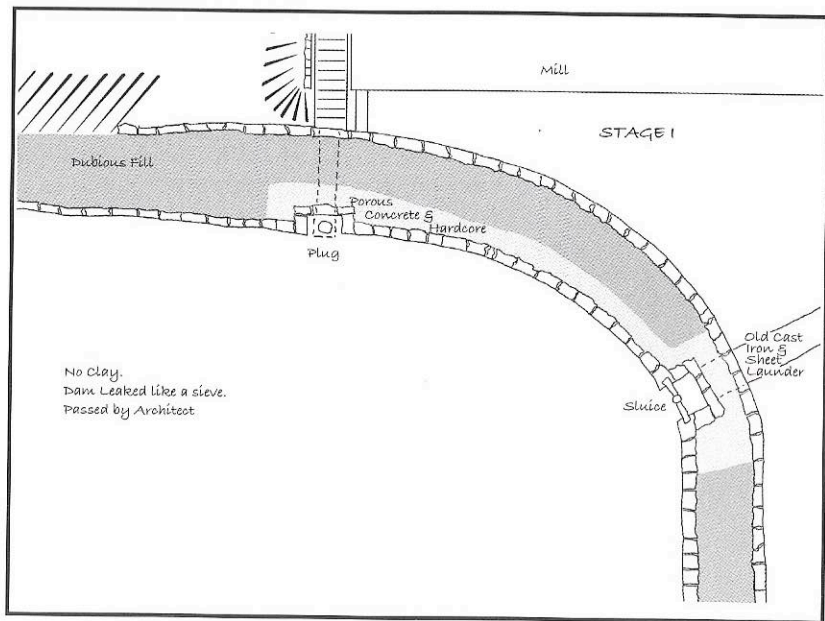
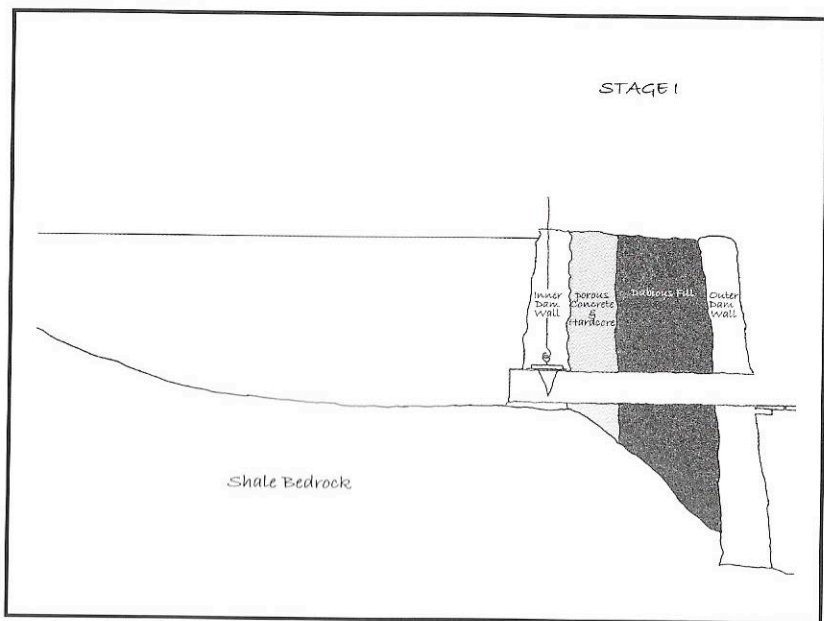
The pond dug out



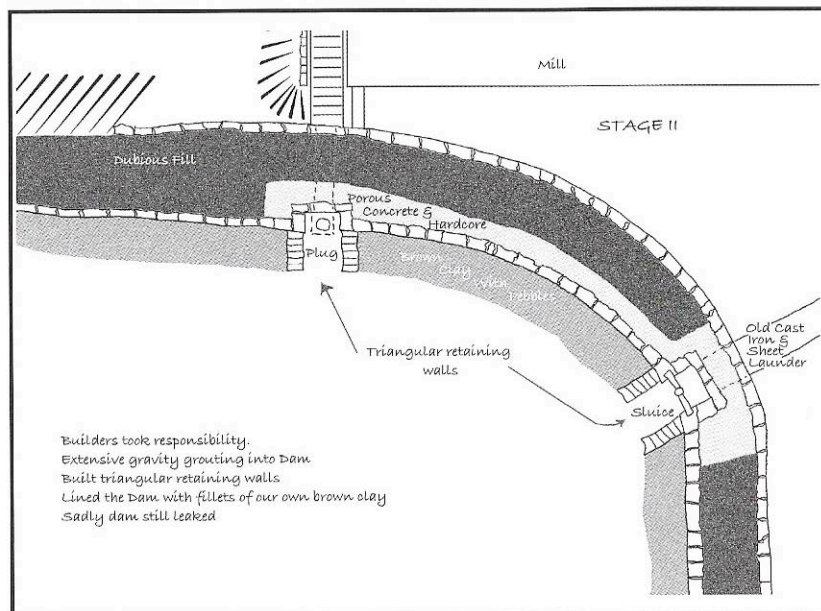
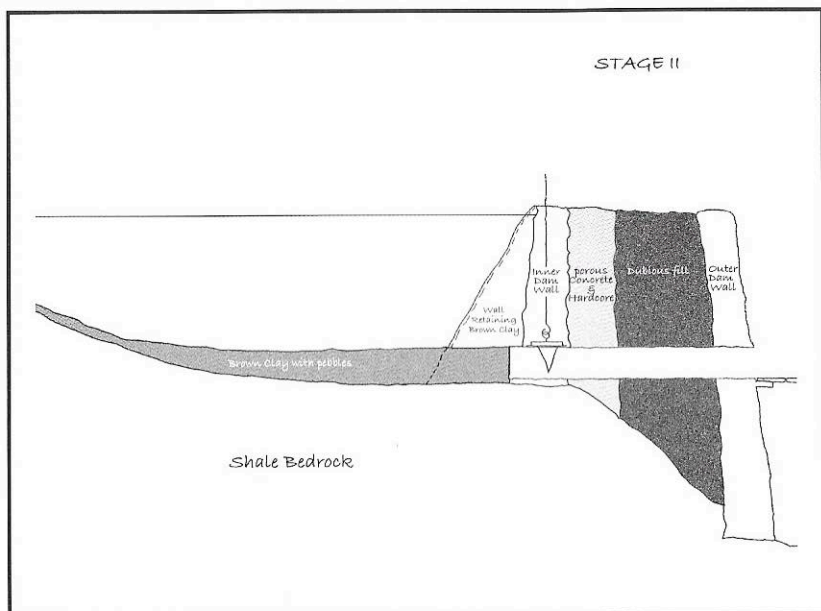
Dam being repaired

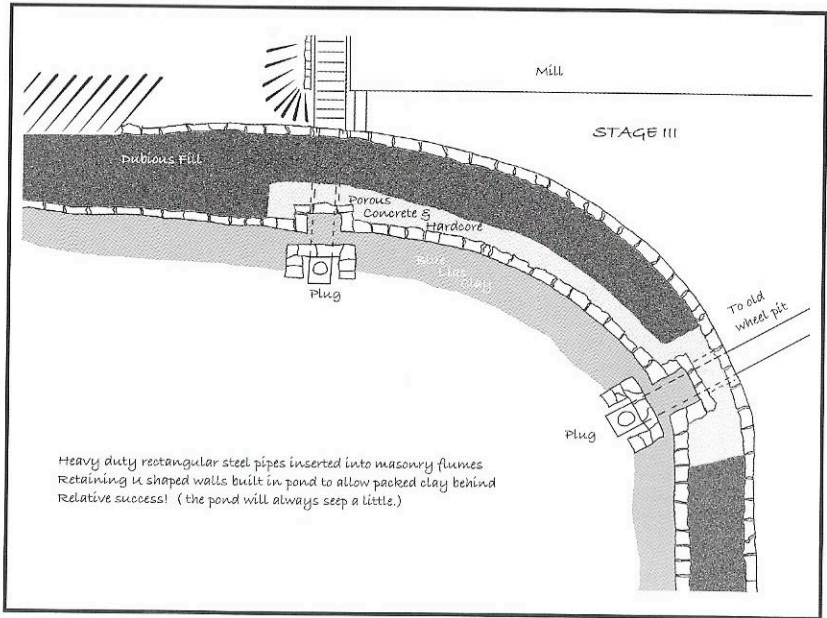
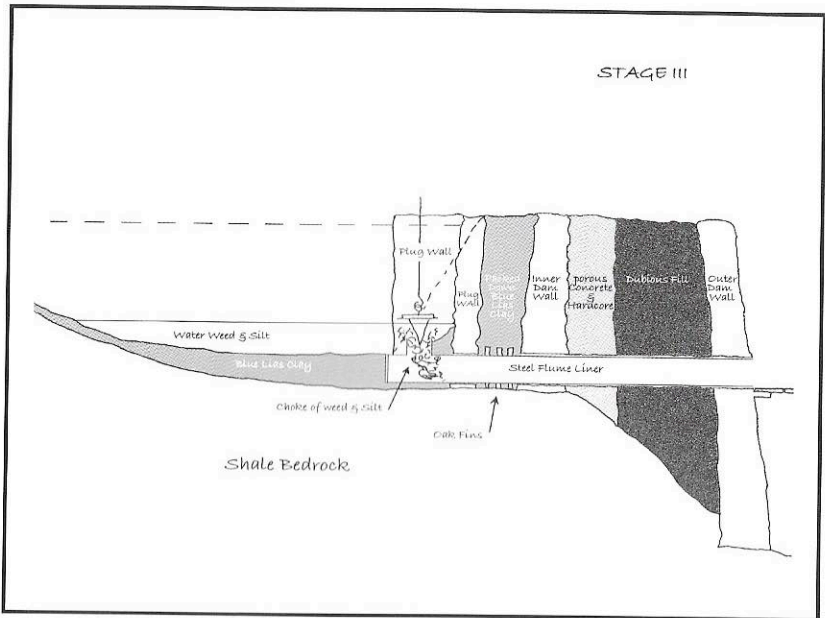


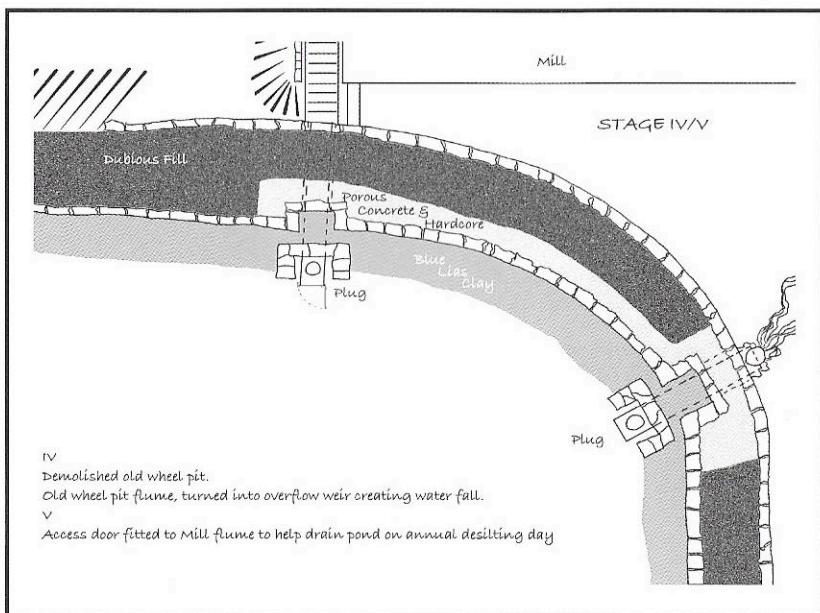
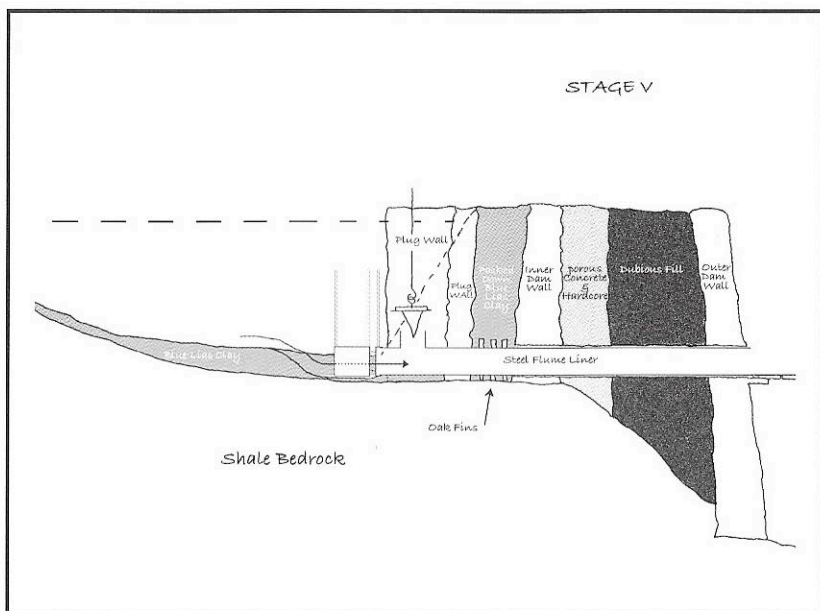
The Pond in it's setting



No clay.  
 Dam Leaked like a sieve.  
 Passed by Architect



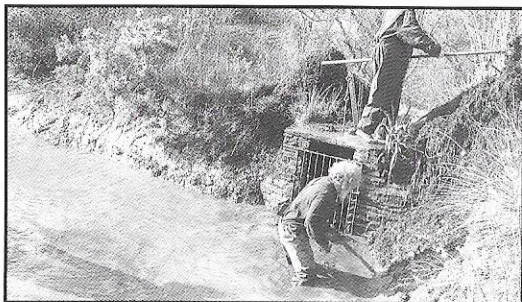




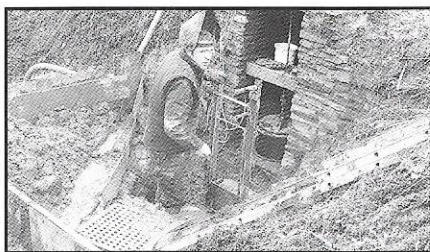
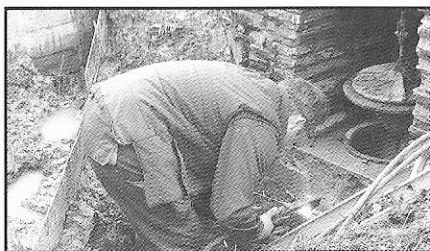
### *Pond Maintenance Notes*

If the leat feeding a millpond is kept running, however slowly, when the stream or river feeding it is in spate, silt will come into the pond and settle. If there are trees round the millpond, autumn leaves will fall in, rot and add to the silt. We did nothing for seven or eight years after finishing Stage III. Both leats were kept running, although not fast, except when milling. The pond filled up with silt. So it was digger, dumper and 140 tons of wet silt on the sloping mill-field to dry out before it could be dealt with. We prayed for dry weather, because if it had rained, all the silt would have slid back into the pond!

What do you do with that much silt and a lane too narrow for anything bigger than a pickup? Dry it, bag it and sell it to a garden



centre? In our case we decided to spread it on the mill field, resulting in a fine crop of thistles, nettles and docks. So we needed a plan B. We decided to empty the pond once a year, employ a team of rakers and pusher/pullers, and swill the silt and weeds towards the plug. The result was that the plug choked and we were left with a residual pond, in which we tried hopelessly to push and pull silt and weeds, which swirled away and back round behind us. To try to clear the choke, two of the team had to drag the weed up the 4 feet on to the dam. The first year we had blanket weed. Have you ever tried lifting sopping wet oversized blankets?



After two annual goes it was time to put our thinking caps on and come up with a plan C. As ever we are indebted to Peter Duffill, ex-River Thames maintenance crew member. It was decided to make a door into the end of the steel flume liner which hopefully would get rid of, or at least considerably reduce, the residual pond. It would also allow any chokes in the flume liner to be rodded from inside the pond (imagine being perched on the launder rodding away when suddenly a tidal wave of sopping weed and silt roars towards you!) It was also decided to make a ramp at the shallow end of the pond, build a couple of compost bins and use porous wheelbarrows to cart as much weed as possible out that way, thus further reducing any possible chokes. Eifion Thomas, our local blacksmith, was commissioned to make and fit the door and also two mesh wheelbarrow buckets. The fitting of the door felt nearly as bad as Ypres must have. It took a cunning coffer dam, designed by Peter, and a pump to keep the water, and the silt at bay.

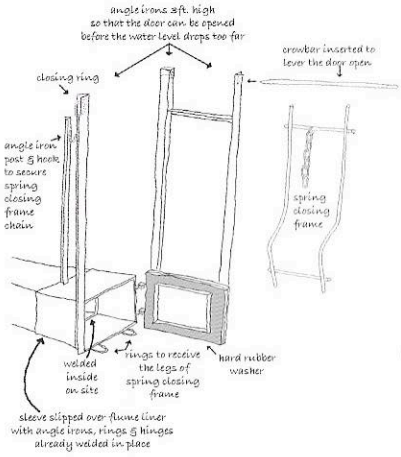
### *'Mucky Mills Gang'*

The 'Mucky Mills Gang' came to help us clean the pond in February 2009. It would be the first time we opened the new door with silt in the pond. There was six months worth of silt. As can be seen from the photographs the door opened with no hitches, the pond emptied completely allowing the pond to be cleaned by nine of us in a morning.

We cleaned the pond in February this year (2010). Now there were only three of us, and Jo's knee isn't very clever! The first morning we cleared the weed up the ramp into the compost bins. The second morning the door opened with a full year's worth of silt to push aside, and we cleared the silt downstream. Jo left us two at it and weeded the island.

Mucky Mills Day 21 February 2009

Felin Hescwm Mill Pond  
New Door to the Flume



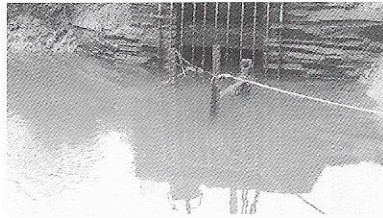
Yard Scraper



Porous Wheel Barrows



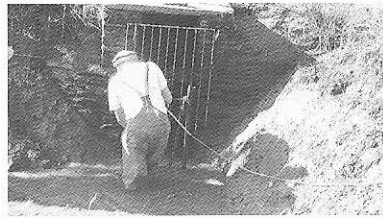
Clearing Weeds in Empty Pond



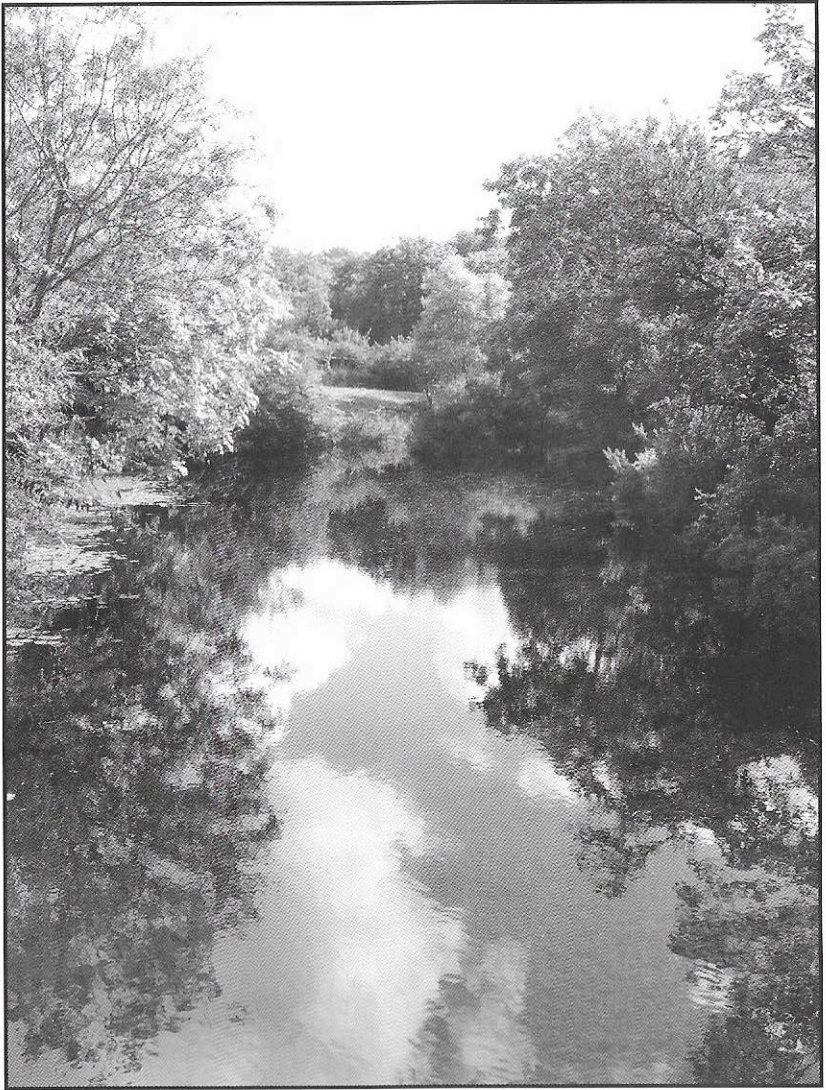
Opening the New Flume Door



Flume Door Open. The Pond Now



John Securing the Flume Door Shut



*Phew! Well we think it was well worth the effort!*