

THE STONE PITS

Most Carltonians are familiar with Carlton Stone, and many are aware that it was quarried locally, but only a few locals can remember the old stone pits before they were filled in. The quarries were in the field still known as 'The Stone Pits' which is along the footpath from Carlton to Shackerstone. Walking towards Keeper's Cottage from Carlton Grange, the footpath runs downhill, crossing Carlton Brook by a plank bridge. The path then runs across the end of the 'Ridge and Furrow' field with a hedge on the left and wiggles through a gateway to come out in the SE corner of the Stone Pits field. This field is easily recognisable by the uneven ground and the shallow bank up to the hedge on the right side of the path. The footpath leaves this field by a stile and a plank bridge over a running ditch bordered by tall trees which is the northern boundary of the Parish.

Local people remember there being two large saucer-shaped pits which together stretched from one side of the field to the other on the left side of the footpath. These pits were about six feet deep at the edges, and there were several mounds of earth and stone and smaller pits in the middle of the field. There was an additional big pit in the SW corner of the field, but this one was deeper than the rest - maybe ten or fifteen feet. The big pits were all eroded, but had sides of bare Carlton Stone in places and were dry at the bottom with small trees and bushes growing there. There was a damp area in the middle of the field where a big willow tree grew, and there were big trees in the hedges and around the edge of the pits. The ground round the edge of the pits was smothered with blue and white violets in the spring. The area was full of rabbits which were often hunted, and The Stone Pits was a popular place for children to play and for courting couples to meet.

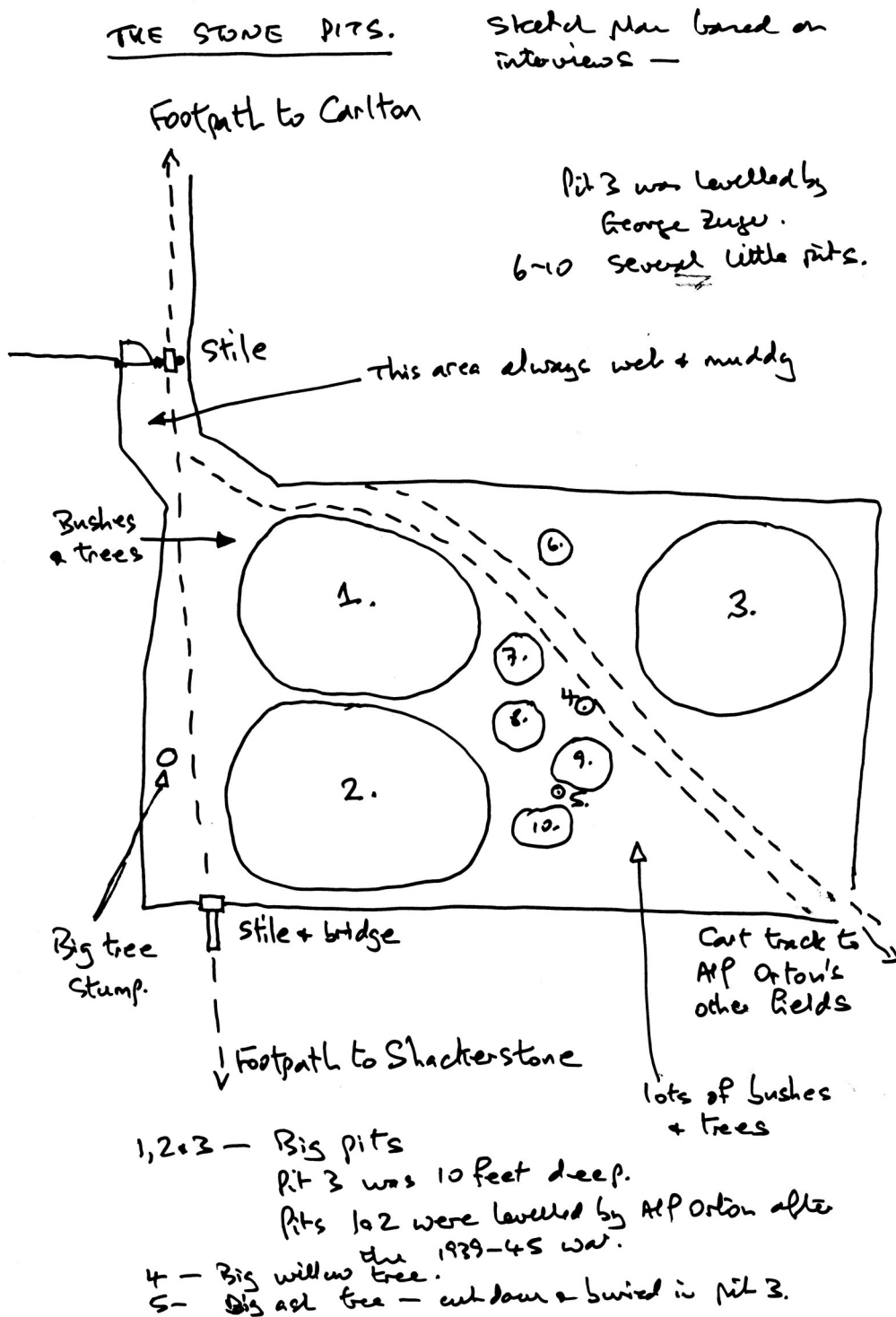
Most of the pits were filled in and grassed over before 1940 by Alf Orton (using the first CAT4 to be seen in Carlton) but one big pit near the footpath was left, and the whole area remained rough. When George Zuger took over Stud Farm in 1951 there was one big pit, several smaller holes, and mounds and hollows. The whole field was levelled soon after this with help from the War Agricultural Committee and using Ministry bulldozers and drivers. Some of the mature trees from the edges of the pits were pushed in and buried. Unfortunately the topsoil and subsoil were not kept separate, so although the field was ploughed and seeded with grass it was always damp and never productive.

Blue and white violets are still common along the bottom of the hedges around The Stone Pits Field, and there are a few cowslips on the bank by the footpath. The old willow tree is hollow and split, but still stands in the middle of the field and is now the biggest tree in the Parish with a girth of 5m. The field now belongs to Paul and Hazel Davenport who graze the eastern part (near the footpath), but have planted the western half with native broadleaved trees with broad rides. The trees are growing well in the damp conditions

and the area is already an important local wildlife habitat which does not suffer from disturbance because it is on private land.

The information in this article has been pieced together from conversations over the summer with Joyce Beadman, Dennis Bream, Hazel Davenport, Norman Oldacres, Janet Tebbatt and George Zuger. I thank all of them for them for interesting discussions and for sharing their memories and local knowledge.

Chris Peat



The text above appeared in the September 2003 issue of Carlton News. The sketch plan has been re-drawn from a plan and notes made in 2003.