

## ROUNABOUT VERWOOD

# PAST and PRESENT

### Does Hatches, Dewlands.

**D**oes Hatches on the River Crane is one of a series of sluice gates controlling the Water Meadow system. The river formed a natural pool here which became a favourite bathing and picnic spot. Hence the inset showing period bathing costumes!

The Crane Valley farms were linked to form the Water Meadow system which allowed a gentle stream of river water to pass over the fields, protecting the growing grass from frost and encouraging its early growth for pasturing.

The water was not allowed to lie stagnant but controlled by a series of hatches, sluices and channels to promote a continuous flow.

Downstream from Romford the control gates were named Webb's Hole (after a magistrate who had fishing rights), Does Hatches and Iron Hatches on the boundary of West Farm and Bridge Farm. The fields were flooded for about ten weeks



July 2015



Photos mid 20th Century



after Christmas and great co-operation was needed amongst the farmers to open and close the gates at the right time to allow the water onto the next farm.

The pasture was used for grazing cattle as it was too wet for sheep. At one time a Lord Shaftsbury insisted on putting sheep on his water meadows despite the advice of his tenant farmers and workers. Needless to say, the unfortunate sheep contracted foot rot and liver fluke so the experiment was not repeated.

The Wimborne St Giles Estate, Lord Shaftsbury's seat, owned much land in this part of Verwood and installed the hatch system.

Today Does Hatches is right on the perimeter of the Crane Valley Golf Course and has hardly changed since the old photo was taken. No doubt the pool is still used for bathing! The railway line to Salisbury was around 100 yards away and was probably on the low embankment visible in the distance on the old photo. This has now completely disappeared in a tangle of trees and undergrowth but a slight hump in the path indicates where it used to go straight over the railway line - not one for today's Health & Safety officers!