



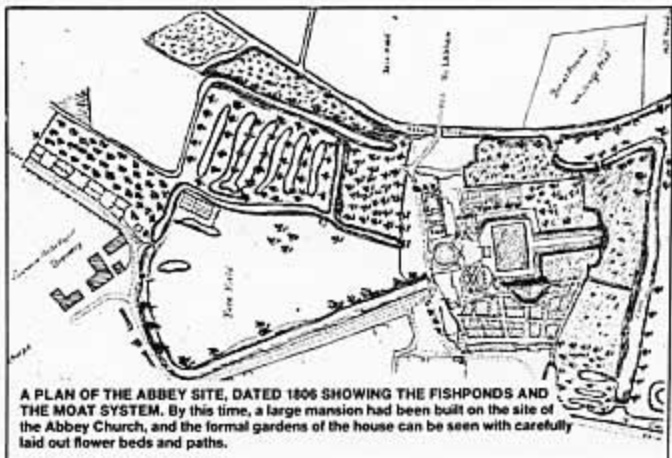
# RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

# The Abbey Fishponds

**This area** once within the precincts of Chertsey Abbey, is almost entirely enclosed by a well-preserved moat and contains the medieval fishponds or "stews", dug at the command of the Abbot John de Rutherwyk in 1308. There were originally seven ponds, although today only three remain.

The ponds played a vital role in the economy of the Abbey. Fish, along with poultry, was a staple part of the medieval monastic diet. These ponds were used to store vast quantities of fish alive until needed in the Abbey kitchens. Weirs were constructed on the river to catch fish, and many of the manors owned by the Abbey were compelled to send large amounts from their own stocks; the manor of Byfleet, for example, had to send 325 eels each year, and Petersham had to supply 1,000 eels and the same number of lampreys.



A PLAN OF THE ABBEY SITE, DATED 1806 SHOWING THE FISHPONDS AND THE MOAT SYSTEM. By this time, a large mansion had been built on the site of the Abbey Church, and the formal gardens of the house can be seen with carefully laid out flower beds and paths.



A MEDIEVAL GARDEN containing fruit trees, beehives and decorative plants

In the earlier centuries of the Benedictine order meat was only eaten on special occasions, when beef or pigs' meat (in the form of pork, bacon or pickled pork) would have provided a welcome variation to the diet. The day-to-day food eaten in the Abbey mainly consisted of dairy produce; cheese, milk, eggs, with bread from corn milled at the Abbey mills which stood downstream on the Abbey River. Vegetables would have included beans, onions and leeks. There would be honey from beehives kept among the fruit trees to aid pollination, and grapes from vineyards on St. Ann's Hill provided wine.

The Abbot John de Rutherwyk, who was responsible for the construction of the ponds, was described as;

*"A most religious Father and a most prudent and profitable lord. . . who might be termed the convent's second founder, the restorer of all really good works and the substantial improver of the manors belonging to the monastery."*

The most famous of all Chertsey's Abbots, he ruled from 1307 to 1346, a period often considered to be the 'golden age' of the monastery. During this time Rutherwyk was responsible for reorganising the management of the Abbey and carrying out an improvement programme of building, repairing, planting trees, acquiring land, rent and privileges. These deeds, from his election to within 2 years of his death, were all carefully recorded in a ledger, one of the few to have survived from the Abbey's library, and now housed in the British Library.



CHERTSEY ABBEY TILE SHOWING THE WINE-BEARER 1250-1300