



WATER SUPPLIES IN GREAT AYTON

Clean drinking water, piped into houses, taken for granted today, only arrived in Great Ayton in the 1929. Until then the village relied on water taken from wells, springs and streams, and water butts. Because most of the village was built on clay, it was difficult to keep wells in good order. Contaminated surface water would run into the well, and the impervious sub-soil would restrict supply.

However, these problems were nothing compared to the industrial conurbations, especially London. A famous cartoon by George Cruikshank in 1832 shows John Edwards, proprietor of Southwark Water Works, seated on the source of his water supply as the sewage laden River Thames.



Contaminated water was, however, no laughing matter. Periodic epidemics of cholera claimed countless lives. There was no known cure, in spite of many supposed remedies.

Public water pumps

For centuries, the only public water supply was from a village pump. The pump would be mounted at the top of a well sunk into the ground to below the water table. There were public pumps in Park Square, opposite the Buck Hotel, and several in the California area. Water would have to be carried in buckets from the pump to the house, often a considerable distance.

With no flush toilets, washing machines, etc, and far less personal washing and bathing, water consumption was much lower. Today, on average , we each use 160 litres of water compared with 20 litres per day in the nineteenth century.



The only remaining pump is on High Green. This pump replaced the notorious “Old Grey Well” outside what is now Worthy Pearson’s shop in Park Square, in 1888.



Private pumps

Many houses had their own water pumps at the rear of the property. The 1894 OS map shows about 60 pumps in the village, mostly behind properties. The photographs show the two pumps installed at a house on Low Green. The water was probably of good quality, since the underlying ground here is sand and gravel, which would filter the water. Apart from the Low Green area, the village stands on impervious clay, making any water source susceptible to surface water contamination.



One family's water sources

Villagers had alternative sources of water depending on its use. John Appleton remembered his grandfather, William Bearby Kettlewell, who lived in one of the four Skitterbeck Cottages, behind Park Square. William came from Loftus to start work in the Roseberry Ironstone Mine around 1910.

William could not move into the cottage unless he agreed to purchase the tall water butt in the back yard, filled from the roof gutter, from the previous tenants. This water was used in the house for washing and other domestic cleaning. Drinking water was taken from the well in Park Square. On Sundays, after chapel, the family had permission from the Frys at Cleveland Lodge to go through a gate in the iron railings and collect buckets of water from the stream opposite the Alms Houses. This water was poured into the copper, ready for washing clothes the following day, Monday.

Given the state of water in the well in Park Square, one cannot help thinking that it might have been better to drink the water from the water butt and restrict the well water for washing.

Endless problems with water supplies

“Resolved the new drainage having dried the wells in the village it is desirable that a supply of water be provided and that a well be sunk opposite the Buck Inn and a pump put down for that purpose.”

Parochial Sanitary Committee, 7 September 1877

“Complaint having been made as to the condition of the Grey Well and the committee having inspected the same find the water in a very filthy state and quite unfit for domestic purposes and they recommend that a well be sunk and a good pump put down at the corner of the High Green on the West side of the present lamp post nearly opposite the Royal Oak Hotel.”

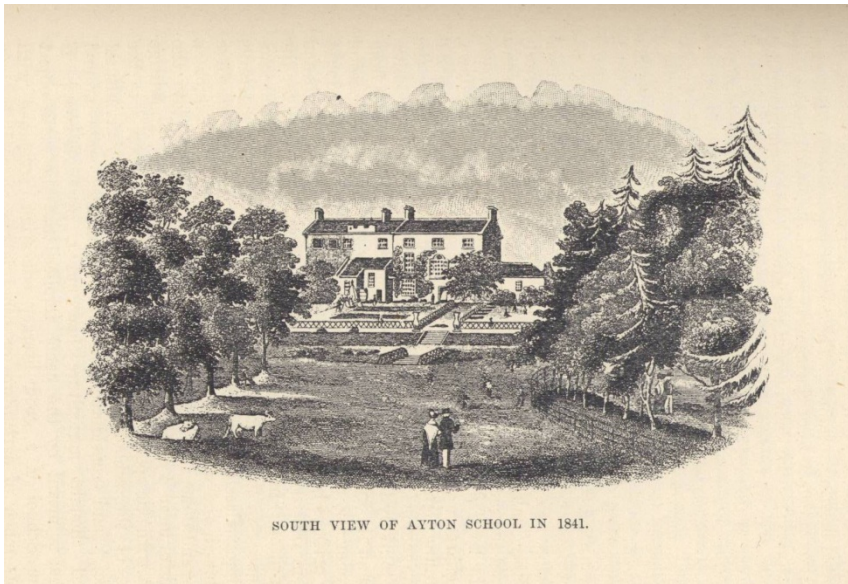
Parochial Sanitary Committee, 27 July 1888

“The Clerk is directed to call the attention of Joseph Mease, Sanitary Inspector, to the state of the drain from the pump on the High Green which seems to be blocked up and also the foul state of the beck, which is causing great complaint in the Village owing to the cesspool at the bottom of California wanting cleaning out.”

Parochial Sanitary Committee, 1 October 1895

Piped water for the Friends

The first piped water supplies in the village were laid by the Quakers, to serve the North of England Agricultural School (later known as the Friends' School). At its opening in 1841, the school relied on rainwater collected from the roof, and wells. The supply was unreliable and within a few years water was piped from a dam in Dikes Beck. However the pipes gradually silted up, and a settling pond and filter bed were constructed higher up the stream, and pipes added to supply Cleveland Lodge. Over the next fifty years the scheme was expanded, until by 1905 there was an elaborate system collecting water from several points on the edges of the moors and carrying in in cast iron pipes to properties in the Cleveland Lodge estate and to the School.



There were two water collection locations in Round Hill Wood with the main source in an old jet mine in Far Bank Wood. Settling chambers were installed inside the mine, and water taken out through a 4½ inch cast iron main. The route taken was to Bank House Farm, then down the side of Dikes Lane, crossing under Aireyholme Lane at the bridge over Dikes Beck, and on to Cleveland Lodge and finally to School Farm. Branches supplied other Cleveland Lodge Estate properties: White House, Rye Hill Farm and Southbrook Farm.



Far left: Entrance to tunnel carrying cast iron main from source in jet mine.

Left: Interior of old jet mine showing access ladders to the surface and settling chambers.

A new well on High Green

In view of the persistent problems of contamination of the Old Grey Well in Park Square, a new well was sunk on the corner of High Green in 1888. The sinking of the well was carried out by miners from the Roseberry Ironstone Mine, managed by J J Burton. The costs are itemised in the Parochial Sanitary Committee Minutes as follows:

Joseph Burton	Sinking well &. 14 feet deep	£2 19 10
John Iley	Pump case and timber work	1 4 3
William Layfield	supplying and fixing pump	2 15 3
William Pearson	Sanitary pipes, Bricks etc	2 12 0
John Nellest	Carting Materials	16 6
	Flint, Gravel and Labour, levelling up &c	<u>5 0</u>
		£10 12 10



Accounts and work superintending by Mr Thos Eeles
Chairman of Parochial Sanitary Committee.

NB A Stench trap taken from near the Grey Well is now
in the possession of Mr Thomas Eeles.

Well by the Buck Hotel

There was a well opposite the Buck Hotel (below right). One of the problems with the water supply to the village was the appalling state of the River Leven. Because most of its flow was diverted alongside Race Terrace to supply the two mills, little was left in the main river,(below left). This resulted in the river being highly polluted with sewage, which would inevitably contaminate the ground water near its banks. In 1900 the well at the Buck Hotel was deepened, resulting in a better supply, but doing little to improve its quality.



Slow progress towards a decent supply

In 1906, the water from the pump on High Green was analysed and found to unfit for domestic use due to pollution. However, with no ready alternative supply, people kept using it.

In 1912, the Medical Officer of Health, Dr Yeoman, commented that a piped water supply for the whole of the Stokesley District “would be a great thing for the sanitary condition though too expensive for each village to supply for itself.”

In 1913 the Tees Valley Water Board stated its intention to apply to Parliament for powers to lay pipes and supply water to several Cleveland villages, including Great Ayton. The First World War interrupted progress, and by 1919 only Yarm had a supply installed.

In the absence of any action by the Tees Valley Water Board, contingency plans were drawn up by a Water Committee appointed in 1922 to improve supplies, especially in Stokesley and Great Ayton.

At first it was suggested that Great Ayton should use water from the Gribdale Whinstone Mine, but since this would require filtration and pumping, it was decided to accept an offer from the Tees Valley Water Board to supply piped water.

Progress continued to be extremely slow. In 1926 the well behind Deuchar Terrace was cleaned out and deepened, without significant improvement in the supply. The well at the Buck Hotel was again polluted.

At last, the Tees Valley Water Board was moved to action and piped water arrived in the village in 1929. Since the village was in Yorkshire, and the new supply had to be paid for, not everyone wanted to be connected. The Committee noted that “in some cases it is most difficult to get the landlords to connect them up to the piped supply.” Rather than admit to not wanting to pay for piped water, a commonly given reason was a dislike of the taste of the new piped water.

The last part of the village to receive mains water was Dikes Lane. In 1976, properties contributed about £700 each to Northumberland Water to pay for a main up to the cross roads with Aireyholme Lane in the 1976.

Gribdale Terrace is still on a private supply from sources on Ayton Banks.

This presentation has been produced by Dennis Tyerman and Ian Pearce.

References:

Yeoman's Acres

D W Tyerman, Bilsdale Study Group, 2007

Stokesley Rural Sanitary Authority Minutes

North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton

Great Ayton Parochial Sanitary Committee Minutes

North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton

Personal recollections of John Appleton, Osmotherley.