Toilet arrangements in Great Ayton   **Ian Pearce   October 2008**

These notes came from an interview with Bill Kirby on Tuesday 21 October 2008 at 11:00am.

"Before the late 1920s, when we got mains water, everybody used an ashbin for the lavatory. There was a building at the back of the yard, we called it the privy or closet, where there was a wooden seat with a hole in it. Some had two holes. Underneath was a metal tray with a handle at each side, and you tipped the household ashes into this tray, every morning. Sometimes the ashes were still warm, but it didn't matter because nothing would catch fire. We used newspaper instead of toilet paper, but it wouldn't burn because it would be damp. There was a cover over the seat. In the summer it could get very smelly and the cover was useful.

There was a passageway with a trapdoor at the back so the ashbin could be taken out and emptied. It was emptied by the scavenger. He came round early in the morning, once a week. In the winter he needed a hurricane lamp. He had a horse and cart. The cart had two wheels and a pivoted container, rather like half an oil-drum, that could be swung over to empty it out at the back. He took the stuff to farmers who wanted it.

There was a bucket hanging from the cart with some pink-coloured disinfectant powder. He would sprinkle a bit over the empty ash bin to sweeten it up, but this didn't have much effect.

Arthur Pickering was the Ayton scavenger. He lived in Poole Terrace at Monkabec. Then Wilson Tanfield took over the job, he lived in Arthur Street. I think that the scavenger stopped just before the Second World War, by then most people had flush toilets, although there were still some of the ash closets still in use. There was one at Stokesley Station for a long time.

I don't remember people using buckets and emptying them in the street."

Separately, Peter Watson remembered Mr Pickering as the scavenger. He also emptied middens - normal domestic rubbish. This rubbish went to the Nunthorpe tip, a series of worked-out whinstone excavations along the Cleveland Dyke at the Nunthorpe end.