

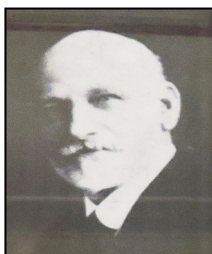
WaterWords

Souvenir Edition: 1st / 2nd April 2018

Ross' historic water supply Weekend of commemoration

Ross-on-Wye is a delightful market town in the south of Herefordshire and said to be the birthplace of tourism in Britain. It stands in a picturesque setting on the banks of the River Wye.

In the story of philanthropy and public service in Ross the name of Alderman Thomas Blake is often stated alongside that of John Kyrle (the 'Man of Ross', 1637-1724) as amongst the most revered in the town. Less well known, to many, was the Alderman's nephew Henry Thomas Blake, the water engineer who was instrumental in bringing about his uncle's vision for a potable water supply for the inhabitants of Ross. Whilst Thomas Blake funded the scheme, he entrusted his nephew to deliver the ambitious project. Henry developed and managed the scheme, based at Alton Court to the east of the town, with resounding success for many years.



Generous and timely donation

In 2012 the Museum Trustees were delighted to receive a most generous donation, from the grandsons of Henry Blake, of the treadle lathe on which he had worked to turn taps and fittings for his water engineering business in Ross, and for the Ross Fire Brigade, which he captained for many years. The lathe came complete with treadle and a large collection of tools and ancillary pieces.



Furthermore, of immense historical importance, the Museum was offered the loan of a display board showing seven of the original taps, together with five fire extinguishers that Henry had made. The significant provenance of Blake's treadle lathe made it ideal to form the focal point for a new display at the Museum: the Historic Workshop.

Development of old boiler space

The donation of the lathe coincided with an idea by Volunteer engineer Fred Snelgrove to create a Victorian/Edwardian engineers' workshop.

Where better to site it than in the original pumping station workshop housed in the space once occupied by an old Cornish boiler which powered the beam engines. Fred has provided many of the historic tools on display and, together with a small group of Volunteer Engineers, has created this wonderful new exhibition space.

The Trustees are grateful to the Friends of Herefordshire Museums & Arts for their most generous grant aid which has enabled the workshop floor to be levelled and the walls to be lined ready to take the new historic exhibits.

Easter Sunday programme

Guest of Honour

Mary Sinclair Powell
Herefordshire historian and indefatigable champion of Ross-on-Wye

Guests, members & visitors are asked to assemble in the Visitor Centre at 1.50 pm

2.00 Welcome and introduction by Richard Curtis (Chairman)

Mary Sinclair Powell

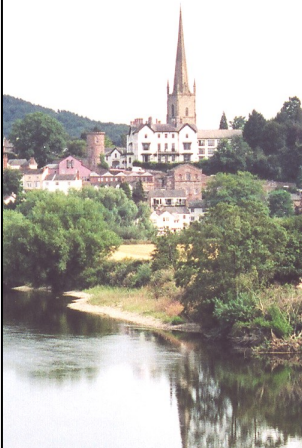
Move to Bay 3

2.15 Mary Sinclair Powell officially opens the new displays

Chairman's party to tour the Museum followed by afternoon tea



**Ross' water supply
Historic timeline**



| | |
|-------|--|
| 1970s | Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water |
| 1932 | Allen diesel engine |
| 1912 | National gas engine |
| 1910 | Wind turbine |
| 1893 | Crossley gas engine |
| 1888 | First supply of water from Alton Court for Ross |
| 1886 | Blakes install Joseph Evans' pumps with steam cylinders at Alton Court |
| 1705 | John Kyrle's supply |

History of water supplies in Ross

In early 2012 the Museum received a visit from Geoffrey Blake, a descendent of Alderman Thomas Blake of Ross-on-Wye. Geoffrey had found a hand-written account of the history of the water pumping station at Alton Court amongst family papers. Geoffrey noted: *I hope I have grasped the sense of this interesting account, despite the sparsity of punctuation in the original. It indicates how my grandfather (Henry T Blake) was involved in giving Ross its water supply, backed by the wisdom and money of his uncle, Alderman Thomas Blake, and how he improved and supervised it for over fifty years.*

This significant transcript of the life and work of Thomas Blake as the Ross Water Engineer is of great historical importance. It has hugely informed our understanding of the historic water supply for Ross and a copy of this document, together with other material prepared by Museum volunteers, will be available on the Museum website (www.waterworksmuseum.org.uk) after Easter 2018.

Museum collection

With the exception of the Hereford collection, the Waterworks Museum has more engines, pumps and other water-related artefacts from Ross-on-Wye than from any other town or location. The Alton Court Waterworks supplied water to the inhabitants of Ross from the late 1880s until the 1970s. For this reason the Museum has chosen the water supply for Ross as the first in a new series of events focussing on the market towns in Herefordshire.

Whereas the City Council of Hereford understood its responsibilities to supply wholesome water to its citizens (1850s), the supply for Ross depended on the efforts of local philanthropists. It was the foresight and diligence of Thomas Blake which provided the first proper piped supply in 1888.



One of two Joseph Evans' pumps 1886 (left) and the producer gas plant (1912) which powered the National gas engine

Alton Court

Thomas Blake purchased the Alton Court Estate of 175 acres (71 hectares) for £11,000, Blake owned a hardware shop in the lower part of Ross and later created an iron foundry. (The shop is still there.)

At Alton Court he installed two pumps made by Joseph Evans & Co of Wolverhampton, driven by steam engines. Blake took over responsibility for the town's water supply from the town commissioners. The agreement was that, in turn, the commissioners would collect water rates from the people of the town.

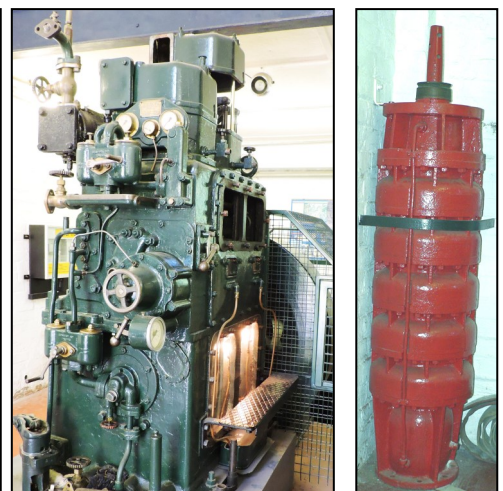
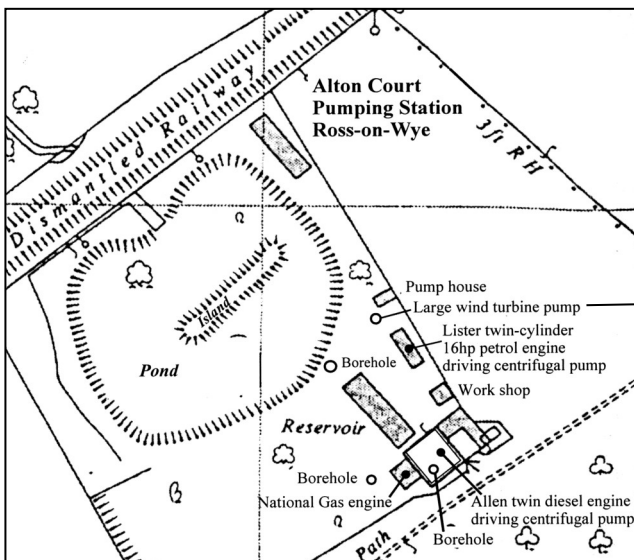
The water was derived from boreholes in the old red sandstone of the area. No water treatment system was ever installed.

Update

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water stopped using Alton Court as a source of water in the 1990s due to high levels of nitrates in the raw water. Work has been undertaken in collaboration with the Environment Agency to understand the catchment better. It remains a potentially useful resource and the licences have been retained to form part of long-term resilience plans. The technology is now available to remove nitrates so the source is potentially viable for use in the future. The buildings are retained along with the reservoir on the hill but the site is no longer used for storage.



National gas engine installed in 1912 to replace two steam cylinders for driving the Joseph Evans' pumps through a gear box



Allen diesel engine (1932) which powered the centrifugal submersible pump (right)