

Historic Water Supply - Ross on Wye

In its collection the Waterworks Museum has many engines, pumps and other artefacts from Alton Court, the waterworks that supplied water to Ross for just over 100 years (from the 1880's to the 1990's). This made the town an obvious choice for the first in a series of days in which we will focus on the historic water supply to Herefordshire's market towns.

This event also coincides with the opening of a new exhibit at the Waterworks Museum, the Old Workshop, which is built around items donated or loaned to the Museum that were used or made by Henry T Blake. He was the Water Engineer of Ross, to whom Alderman Thomas Blake entrusted the delivery of his vision for a public water supply for Ross on Wye.

The story of public water supply for the town of Ross is succinctly (and very helpfully) described on the town's website, from which the following information has been extracted for the purposes of this display.

Additional information is available in files prepared by the Waterworks Museum to accompany this display, information from which will, in due course, be available on the Museum's website.

Water Supplies

Ross on Wye's water supplies originally came from public and private wells situated around the town, many of which have since been filled in or capped. The first piped supplies to the town were set up by John Kyrle, circa 1700, but this was not significantly improved until Thomas Blake modernised the system in the 1870's.

The Prospect and the Town's Water Supply

The Prospect was, at one time, a very important part of a system for the supply of clean and fresh water to the town. The Prospect originally contained a fountain, constructed by John Kyrle, and the water was pushed up from the river by a pump. The location is believed to have been approximately where the War Memorial now stands but no drawings of its actual style or design have been found.

Under the Prospect is a water tank described as being "the size of a small ballroom" and has brick walls with flag stone flooring. This tank was last accessed in the 1960's and was found to be completely dry. Unfortunately since then the precise location of the man access point to the tank has been forgotten. The water was then sent around the town to public taps in the street for the townsfolk to use. This had completely fallen into disrepair by 1827 and water was a problem again.



Access point to Prospect water supply



Inside the water course

Thomas Blake established the Alton Court Water Works in 1887 and this helped to solve the problem of how to get fresh water into the town. He then built a reservoir in the Prospect, which was supplied by a gas or oil powered pump that was located in a building by the Hope and Anchor pub at the end of the Rope Walk.

The water was distributed around the town via a pipe network and the largest user was likely to be the brewery. The system is believed to have been abandoned around the time the brewery closed. The reservoir has since also been filled in and the pump, and building that housed it, have since been removed so very little physical evidence remains of the efforts put in the water supply that must have been so important to the town.

Market Place: On the northeast side of the Market House was a public well that supplied the central part of town via a pump that was situated there.

Cawdor Well: The Cawdor Well is on the northern boundary of the urban part of Ross, on the Ross Urban and Ross Rural boundary, and was fed from five weak springs coming up through the sandstone¹. The well was renowned in the area for curing rheumatism and similar ailments.



The site of Cawdor springs

The map below clearly identifies that there was a well here and the photo above is thought to be the area where the springs came to the surface. The well was located south of here on the lower side of the path where a house has now been built.



The site of the Cawdor Well in 1937

Reproduced from the 1937 Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright

By 1935 the well had been filled in although it was still marked on OS maps until much later. Today there is no actual sign of the well except that the springs still run and this accounts for the water that runs down the path from the top of Brampton Hill (just below the entrance to River View) down to Cawdor Arch Road.

Edde Cross Street: The site of the 3rd well in Ross was on the corner between Kyrle Street at the point where Edde Cross Street becomes Trenchard Street. The head of the well was actually on the far right of the picture where there is a driveway now. The well was sunk in 1844 and the pump was installed in 1845 by the Ross Town Commissioners. The land was purchased by private subscription and dedicated for public use forever.

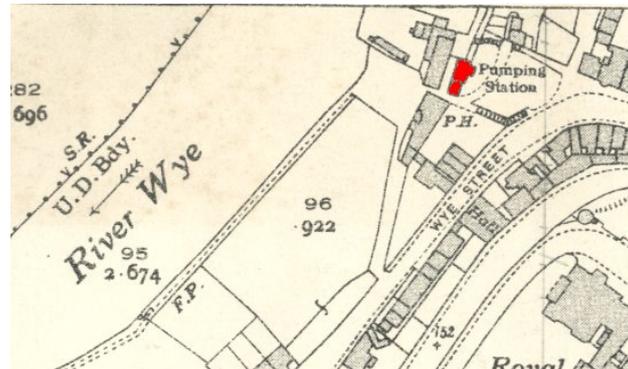


The site of the 3rd well in Ross

Crofts Well: During renovation works at the Crofts in September 1986, a private well was dug up at the rear of the buildings.

The Towns Water Supply - Water Pumped from the Wye

John Kyrle was responsible for the first piped water supplies in Ross. He set up a waterworks at "The Dock" (next to the Hope and Anchor) and the water was pumped from a pool in the river up to a tank in the Prospect and from there it was piped around the town.



The site of the Pump House in 1937

Reproduced from the 1937 Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright

In 1935 these works were still in use as a soft water supply - where the water was used as boiler feed and for non-potable uses in a few houses. By this time the water was supposedly pumped up to the Prospect using a turbine driven race from the Rudhall Brook,¹ but within living memory there was an oil engine at the Hope (circa 1950). The pump was renowned for being noisy, smelly and visible through the wire fence.

Source: http://www.ross-on-wye.com/index.php?page=ross_070-Water_Supply&pg=3

Early water supply from One Mill



*One Mill was fed from the Rudhall Brook
(Seen here coming under Edde Cross Bridge)*

"New Mill", which was built sometime before 1418 as a Grist Mill (for grinding grain into flour), was also called "One Mill" (as mills were named after the number of mill stones that they had).

The last building on the site had been there since 1666 and was demolished and removed during the 19th Century.

The pond for this mill was quite small and was probably bordered to the east by Trenchard Street thus limiting its size.

The Towns Water Supply - Merrivale Water Works



The site of Merrivale Tank

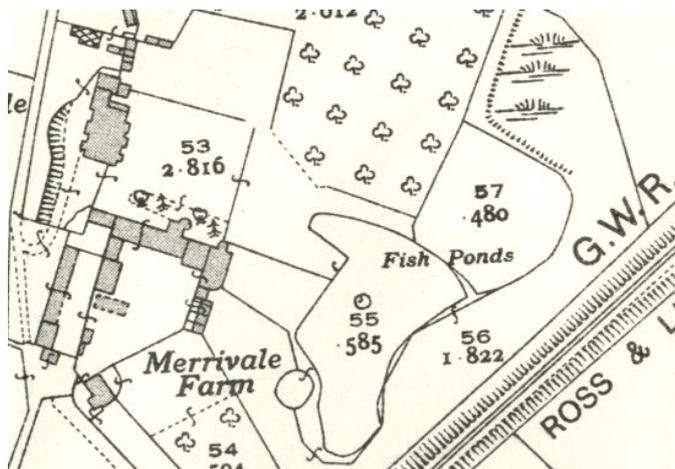
This is believed to be the site of the 25,000 gallon Merrivale Tank. Water was pumped to the tank, which was used to provide a static pressure (head) to the water, from the Merrivale Water Works (which also supplied a tank at Merrivale Farm).

The Merrivale Water Works was originally built to supply the Merrivale Estate, which includes Ashfield, but was extended to supply the Alton Court Brewery on Station Street.

A spur was fitted to the water main to supply a tap located at one corner of the Market House.

The water for the works was supplied from springs but in 1887 new works were built at Alton Court fed from artesian wells. The Merrivale Works were then abandoned and the springs were diverted to run into the ponds at Merrivale House.

Local memories of the tank are that there was a brick arched frontage, which had fallen into dis-repair by the 1950s.



The Merrivale Farm and Ponds
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The Towns Water Supply - Alton Court Water Works



The front of the Alton Court pumping station

The Ross Waterworks (at Alton Court) was established in 1887 and was run by the Trustees of the late H. T. Blake. It supplied "hard water of good quality" and was originally supplied from four artesian boreholes in the Old Red Sandstone. The works had no water filtration facilities and pumped the water up to the tank in Tank Meadow. This was done by an oil pump and by a wind pump.

The boreholes were 37, 45, 62 and 100 foot deep respectively and no. 1-3 were 6 foot in diameter whilst no. 4 was 24 foot. The yeild from each was 72,000, 96,000, 144,000 and 277,200 gallons every 24 hours. Borehole no. 1 flows into a reservoir tank, no. 2 & 3 feed into suction-wells and no. 4 was pumped directly.



The side of the Alton Court pumping station



The back of the Alton Court pumping station

Borehole no. 4 was sunk by Messrs. C. Isler and Co. Ltd in 1929 and was the only one still in general use by 1935. The pump for this borehole was submerged at 35 feet from the surface and was capable of pumping 25,000 gallons per hour. During the pumping the water level dropped by 33 feet and remained there during the pumping and rapidly recovered when pumping stopped and during the winter the borehole overflowed into the ponds (which are normally fed by natural springs).

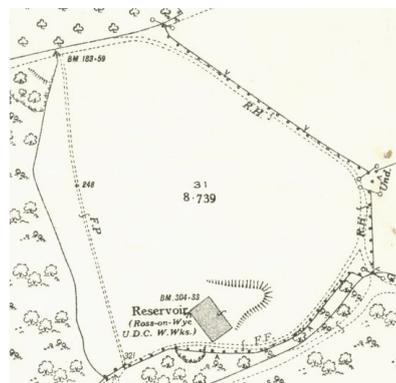


*The Alton Court works and Ponds
Reproduced from the 1937 Ordnance Survey map. © Crown copyright*



A well top at the pumping station

The water works was able to supply a daily average of 200,000 gallons per day, which was increased to 240,000 gallons per day during the summer; the maximum available was 312,000 gallons per day.



Tank Meadow

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