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New Sewers and Piped water, 1950's.

In the early 1950s a firm by the name of Millards came to Bugbrooke to lay a completely new sewer system within the village, they put all their huts and caravans, and equipment in the small paddock, come Orchard, next to the Church that was farmed by Mr Jeffery the farmer in Bugbrooke High Street.

In the same field between the brook and Bugbrooke Churchyard, exactly opposite to the gateway into Wards ladder making Factory, they drove very long interlocking piles deep into the ground, followed by excavating all the soil and clay from out of the inside area to where they had piled.

There was a hole in the ground so big you could fit a normal sized house into it. To us young lads it was huge. A reinforced concrete base was put in followed by shuttering up the sides with lots of metal mesh to reinforce the concrete. It had several compartments within it that we could see while it was being constructed, this was followed by more shuttering and metal meshing to form the top that had holes to it, where later very large manhole lids were fitted, on the top of this huge pit they built a pump house that still stands to this day.

At the same time a new sewer bed was being built along the Heyford Road next to the brook. Mr Champion used to come into School, and take all of us that were in the top class along to see the new sewer beds being constructed. It was a project that he wished us to witness and record, for he said it would be one of the biggest changes in Bugbrooke in our lifetime. Between the new sewer bed and the pump house in Bugbrooke a large heavy pipe was being lain across the fields, this long large trench was also walked by us pupils with Mr Champion, for between Bugbrooke and Heyford sewer beds, were to be several different types of soil from pure sand to gravel and blue clay.

Once the sewer beds were completed along with the pump house in Bugbrooke, the first trenches were dug from the pump house in either direction from it in Church Lane. Two more trenches were dug, one across the Park to the West End of Bugbrooke, and the other up Little lane (Ace Lane) up to Elm Tree Bank.

The trench that went all the way to the Green opposite our School divided. One trench was dug all the way to Mr Barford's Garage, whereby another spur diverted off, that would later take the sewer from all the new buildings that were taking place, such as from Levitts Road and Chipsey Ave, the other trench was all the way up Butts Hill and along to the Crescent.

The other trench that diverted from the Green opposite Bugbrooke School, was to be taken all the way up Bugbrooke High Street through beds of pure sand as well as beds of blue clay. The trench from Little Lane connected to this at Elm Tree Bank, and carried on to the bottom of Camp Hill, where another diversion went up Pilgrims Lane, the trench was to continue all the way up Camp Hill to the very end houses on the right up the Gayton Road.

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Section after section of this piping starting from the pump house, was tested by filling sections of the piping with water under pressure. If and when there were no leaks the trenches were filled in, within the pipes that were lain each and every spur to houses or yards that were later to be connected were to be all in place. Mr Campion used to explain to us all in class, about the planning that had to be done so everything went off smoothly.

At the same time as the sewer was being lain, another company named Hickman's were to work alongside of Millards digging up the opposite side of the roads laying fresh water mains, this in turn when these two projects were completed, made such a difference in Bugbrooke in more ways than one. (The Water Pipes at the time, were to be made from Asbestos)!

It was not long before every house in Bugbrooke was connected onto the water and sewer mains. Once the sewer system was up and running, Mr Campion was to take all of us from the top class with Mr Lantsbury, along to see how it all worked. With large arms rotating over round beds, sediment tanks, screens that separated lots of material and detritus before it entered the system, we were taken to the exit pipe where the clean water re-entered the brook. One of the council supervisors who gave a talk about the system, was to say the water after it had been treated was fit enough to drink, whereby he collected a glass of it from where it ran back into the brook and drank some to our surprise. He asked if anyone else wanted to try and taste the waters, most of us did after seeing him drink some, there was no funny taste to it when I tried, with no ill effects from doing so.

During one talk Mr Campion gave us in school after the mains water and sewer were up and running, he had a question time, whereby we had to tell him about how we found the new improvement that had taken place. For us at the time it did away from having a bucket toilet that had to constantly emptied, it did away with the sentry type toilet, that was put over a freshly dug hole somewhere on the garden and moved about accordingly, as well as the very large earthen toilets that were emptied once a year, most of them had a row of holes within the seating, so you could all sit in a row talking in these large communal toilets, within them, they had workbenches, wheelbarrows, garden equipment, all in sundry as well as the copper that was boiled up twice a week, once for the washing on Mondays, the other when it was bath night, normally on a Friday.

The job ceased to be for Mr Joseph Hakes, who had the job of emptying the toilet buckets in Bugbrooke, Kislingbury and Heyford. Ginger the horse that pulled the cart was put into retirement, and the old midden cart finished up in Heyford allotments. It was once known as the midnight cart, for at one time the buckets used to have to be emptied after dark as late as possible, but during the blackout of the Second World War, this ruling was wavered as no lights were permitted to be used after dark. It was quite common during the blackout to trip over a pavement or walling, spilling all the contents over the pathways etc, hence us seeing this cart in action when going back and forth to school in the days just before its demise, along with its wonderful aroma that it gave off.

For myself, once the sewer and water mains were up and running, it was to do away with a little earner or pocket money for me, as I was often asked by many of the old ladies in Bugbrooke to empty the toilet bucket, by digging a hole in the garden and burying it for them.

The other job for pocket money I lost, was fetching water from the many wells within the village, I remember one week, I earned more money by emptying toilet buckets, and fetching water, than my father did when the aircraft factories closed down after the war. This was while he was working temporary on a local farm, much to his surprise.

One farmer in the village (Mr Brown), would pay me to pump water from the well, and fill the header tank that was above the milk cooler during milking times, some times before school and other times after. Once the water started to run out from the header tank overflow pipe, he would say "thank you bwoy". He always seen me alright money wise, or in kind.

Most of all these old wells were capped off. Many were filled completely in with rubble and rubbish that made them safer than those that were crudely capped off with railway sleepers or sheets of corrugated tin, so causing problems in later years.

Some of these wells were used by the Home Guard to hide down, or to store equipment and such likes in case of an emergency. Bert Surridge who served in Bugbrooke Home Guard was to show us many of these old wells, especially those that were outside of the village within the local fields, or next to barns and hovels etc.

During the period of construction to the mains water and sewer system, up Camp Hill where we lived, there used to be very large grass verges to store and stack many of the sewer and Water pipes on, also they used to have a Night Watchman's Hut next to them with a large Brazier that they burn coke in to keep warm through the nights, or to boil up kettles etc on it over time. For on this same large grass verge over the years, is where they stored large heaps of granite chipping and gravel, that would be eventually used for resurfacing the roads with at a later date when all the work had been completed.

When they were to start digging out the very large trenches in the area where we lived, to lay the sewer or the water pipes, mother would send myself, and brother Malcolm out with our trolley loaded with two urns on it, one full of piping hot tea, and the other with coffee, as well as a load of old tin mugs, a pot of sugar, and a jug of milk, and a bucket of hot water to wash and rinse the mugs out in after they had been used.

We would go around to every workman in the trenches, selling them hot drinks for a few pence at a time. It was quite a lucrative little earner for her and extra pocket money for us both, especially when it was very wet and cold.

The foreman on Millards was named Mr Flanagan. He always had a free cuppa of whatever to keep us in his good books, as the saying goes. One day he happened to come to our house just as mother was frying up some black sausages for dinner, he said he liked the

smell of them as they were being cooked, so mother gave him some between two slices of buttered bread.

Mother was to tell him that they came from Mr Harry Lovell's Butchers Shop at the bottom of Camp Hill, from then on, Mr Lovell was to do a roaring trade with black sausages, as the demand for them from the men who worked for Millards once they had a taste of them, Mr Lovell could not produce enough of them quick enough, for they were normally only seasonal food during the period when they killed the pigs ready for winter food, it was never eaten all year around like some foods were, as they were made from the blood from the pigs when bleeding them during the slaughtering of them.

The first winter that came after all the buckets had been done away with, and flush toilets were installed, new problems with it were to arise. Our toilet was still outside next to the barn where the bucket toilet was and even though father had lagged the pipes in it, along with having a small heater burning all night, it still managed to freeze up, so the toilet door had to be altered slightly so as there was no draft, coming from it, for it had three inches gap on the top of it and another three to four inches gap on the bottom. Once the door was altered along with getting rid of all the drafts, it no longer froze up over night.

One man who went around Bugbrooke once a week, emptying all the dust bins with the dust or ash cart as it was called, he remarked about the large amount of disused chamber pots that kept appearing in all the dust bins, once every house had been equipped with an indoor flush toilet. For every house hold there would have been at least a minimum of three to four, as there were normally one or two under each and every bed in the house. I should think throughout the village there must have several hundred of them thrown away or discarded, some had beautiful designs and flower patterns on them. Several village folk were to put them to one side just encase they were needed again, but due to the toilet being in the house, it meant no more trips outside whatever time of the day or night it was, (it would have been an antiques bonanza for those that collected Chamber Pots).

Many houses within the village had the flush toilet put into the bathroom within the house. Doing so meant there were no more freeze ups for them. The only problem that arose was once the toilet was indoors, alongside of a bath, and wash hand basin, with mirrors on the walls, queues' would build up waiting to get into the toilet during the morning rush hour when getting ready to go to work etc.. In the good old days, when the toilet was up the top of the garden or next to the barn etc, there would not be any queuing, especially if it was extremely very windy, along with cold rain or snow. Before an electric light was installed, we used to have to go by torch or candle light, also newspapers to wipe one with before toilet rolls came along.

I well remember one very elderly man remarking about the new flush toilets being fitted inside of most of the houses, for he thought that to have a toilet within the house was disgusting, for as far as he was concerned, the further away from the house the better, the other thing he would remark about, were the new houses that were being built with no chimneys, as they were to be centrally heated, he used to say wherever are they going to cure the bacon if they have no chimney, for in days past all pig sides were smoked up inside the Inglenook chimneys, he was very reluctant to change.

A bit of Bugbrooke's history.

Stanley Joseph Clark.