

**Warwickshire
Industrial Archaeology
Society**

Occasional Papers

Number One

Seven Springs

**Water supplies to the Warwickshire villages of
Knightcote, Northend, Fenny Compton,
Avon Dassett and Burton Dassett.**

by

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May 1997

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

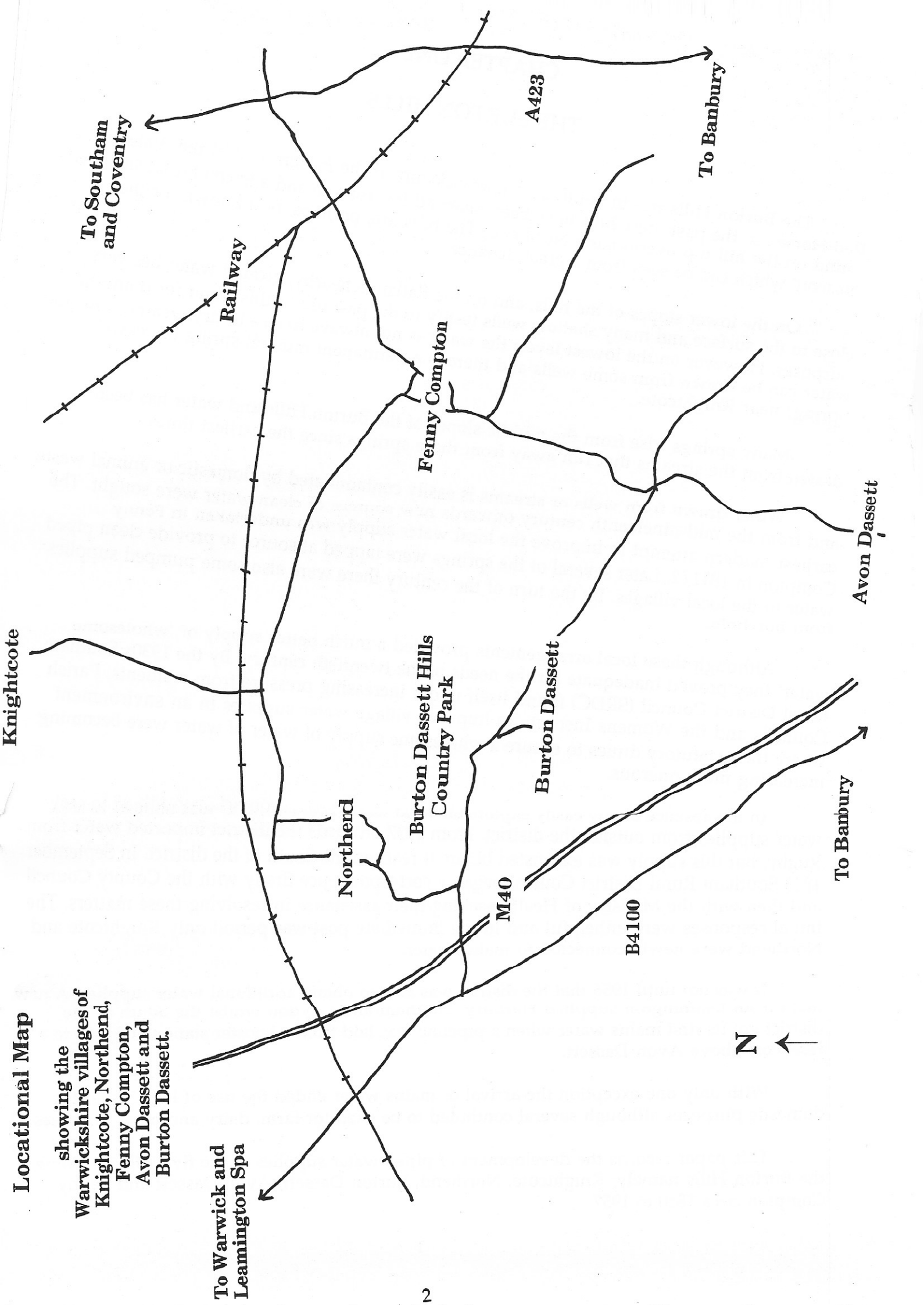
Warwickshire County Council.
The Kimbell Charity.

Mr. Ridley Ellis.
The Rev. Phillip Frances.
Mr. William Griffiths.
Mr. Robert Husselbee.
Mr. Ken Perry.
Mr. and Mrs. J. Plester.
Mr. Reg. Watts
Mr. Charles Worrel.
Mr. Robert Yardley.

John W. Brace.
May 1997.

Locational Map

showing the
Warwickshire villages of
Knightcote, Northend,
Fenny Compton,
Avon Dassett and
Burton Dassett.



CHAPTER TWO

THE KIMBELL CHARITY

The Kimbell Charity provided water to Northend (North End) and Knightcote from the end of the last century until just after the war.

The Kimbell charity dates from 1469 when a Mr John Kimbell (Kimble) left land in Mollington in trust for the benefit of these two hamlets. The earliest modern record of these charity activities is the 1831 Report of the Charities Commissioners which makes no mention of any involvement in this charity in water supply. However J. Tom Burgess in his book *Historic Warwickshire* writes that in 1871 the feoffees (trustees) of the Kimbell Charity decided: "to supply the hamlet of Knightcote with water from the Burton Hills, for which purpose the sum of £300 was borrowed to defray the expense, to be paid back by instalments out of Kimbell's charity; consequently, a small moiety only will now be given for the roads till this debt is paid off."

No further details are given and the next reference to the charity's activities in water supply is found in a Schedule of Property annexed to the registration of the Kimbell Charity in accordance with *Charitable Trusts Acts 1853 to 1891*, and dated the 4th day of August 1893. The Schedule of Property includes the following:-

Reservoir in Fox Cover, in Burton Dassett, and right to use and conduct water to Village of Knightcote, held from Lord Willoughby de Broke, from year to year, at a rent of 5s.

Two Reservoirs in North End, and right to use and conduct water to Village of North End, held from Mrs Ann Staples, from year to year, at a rent of 5s.

Waterworks in connection with the above mentioned reservoirs.

It has not proven possible to exactly date the construction of the three tanks. The Knightcote tank was almost certainly the first, being built in, or soon after, 1871. The Northend tanks followed and were certainly complete by 1893. If the building of the Northend tanks was funded by borrowing, and the charity appears unlikely to have been in the position to fund these works out of current income, the absence of any reference to debt in 1893 would indicate that these tanks must have been built some years earlier, i. e. before 1890.

The Charity's water was used not only domestically but also by farmers and bakers and no doubt many others in the two villages and on the farms close to the supply pipes. By the 1930s, and probably earlier, the demand exceeded supply with the taps often running dry. Shortages were not confined to the dry summer months for on 10 January 1945 Burton Dassett Parish Council was writing to the effect that "recent rainfall had very little affect on the supply to the top part of Northend." When the 'taps' ran dry, water was drawn from the old wells and ponds. If water needed to be brought any distance a wooden shoulder yoke might be used to carry two buckets or cans of water home.

That the Trustees sought to increase the water supply is evidenced by the three new feeder pipes into the Knightcote tank - pipes that were probably installed at different times. The Trustees were also known to have undertaken gauge testing of seven local springs in May 1935. Although the total yield was found to be some 30 000 gpd it does not appear that any new supplies were exploited as a consequence of this testing.

At the end of 1943 solicitors acting for the Charity wrote to the RDC inquiring if the council would be prepared to take over the water undertaking with a view to increasing the supply. The SRDC was favourably disposed to do so but lacked the basic resource - they had no water. Although the Rugby supply had been extended to the Marlborough Camp (now CAD Kineton) by the War Office, the main was not available to serve the local demand. After the war, SRDC was able to purchase this main and brought mains water to Knightcote and Northend in 1947/8. In preparation for doing so the Kimbell Charity's water assets were purchased from the trustees at a cost that was apparently £100.

The new water supply was only intended to 'supplement' the old water services. The new 4 inch main was laid to intercept the distribution pipes in Top Street, Northend, before continuing to the Knightcote turn on the Fenny Compton road where it connected to the Knightcote supply. It is not clear how the engineers intended to interconnect and continue to use four different water supplies. This was only resolved in December 1946 when the Medical Officer of Health reported that "in his opinion the existing supplies could not be considered safe at all times and he did not consider it advisable to use such supply in conjunction with the piped water supply from Rugby." It is not clear for how long the old water distribution pipes continued to be used in Northend but in Knightcote it was not until September 1955 that a new main was laid and the villagers were invited to have water in their cottages.

So ended the Charity's involvement in water supply - henceforth villagers had to pay for their water.

As a postscript it is interesting to record that the new water supply was found wanting. Soon after the water was laid on SRDC was getting complaints about low water pressure - the taps were running dry.

All three of the Kimbell Charity's tanks survive. They are brick tanks with shallow brick arched roofs. All are semi-sunken with the top of their sides originally at ground level. They are located in gullies with spring water entering from uphill. The downhill face of the two Northend tanks have steel access doors - it is likely that a similar door was provided on the Knightcote tank but this is now lost. Two tanks are known to have a brick lined collection chamber and sump upstream of the tank. Clayware land drains discharged ground water into these chambers which had a steel outlet pipe running to the main tank. Their effectiveness is uncertain - it is known to have been necessary to clean out the two Northend tanks after the war. It is not known whether a similar sump was provided for the third tank. The two Northend tanks are known to have had underground outlet control valves operated by a long key.

The Knightcote Tank.

This tank lies within New Covert (Fox Covert or Fox Cover) on the Eastern edge of the country park at GR399521. This land has recently been acquired by Warwickshire County Council and is now open to the public. The tank roof has collapsed into the tank but there is sufficient hard evidence supported by local knowledge to be sure that this tank had a similar brick arched roof as the others. The capacity of this tank has been reported to be 21805 gallons.

Three inlets can now be seen on the North and West sides of the tank - a fourth inlet, entering just below the weir, has been lost during recent clearance work. To the west and a little to the side can be seen a modern manhole access cover. This cover is believed to provide access to the original collection chamber and sump. A well lying some 100 yards to the South may also have fed into the tank. The two inlets from the North and the inlet under the weir are almost certainly not original but installed later in an effort to increase the supply.

The tank outlet pipe flows across the adjacent field and along the road to Knightcote where it is known to have supplied four village stand pipes - at total of about 2 miles. Water would also have been run to the local farms and larger houses but only supplies to Knightcote Hall Farm and Highledge Farm have been identified at this time. Of the four stand pipes shown on the 1904 survey only one survives and that is a modern reconstruction not faithful to the previous design which is reported to have been a heavy concrete slab supported by brick walls.

Sold to SRDC in about 1946 this tank continued to be the sole source of piped water to Knightcote until about 1948. Subsequently it continued to serve the local farms and village bakery for several years longer. At first the farmers entered into agreements with SRDC to use water from this tank - Mr Ivan Griffith of Knightcote Hall Farm was asked to pay £10 per annum in 1947. In 1953, when SRDC had lost interest in retaining control of this supply Mr Griffith leased the right to use this water from the owner of the land that the tank was built on - the Right Honourable John Henry Peyto Lord Willoughby De Broke. It is not known when this arrangement ended but by that time the pipework was in poor condition and the water was not always clean. The pipe needed repair on several occasions - the last known failure was in about 1970 in the field below the covert. The absence of more recent failures suggests that the supply is now blocked.

The Northend Tanks.

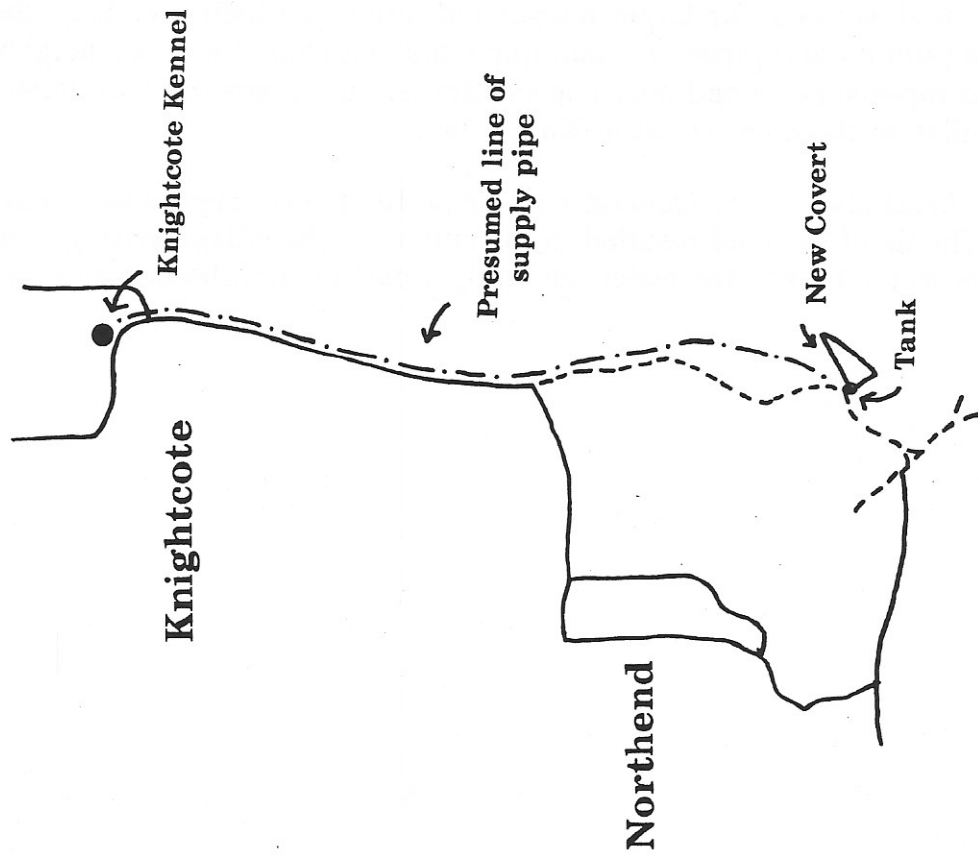
The two Northend tanks served different parts of the village. Nothing can be seen of the most westerly tank, at GR393524, as this is now hidden in dense scrub. This tank, reported to have a capacity of 18316 gallons, was cleaned out after the war and there is local knowledge as to its construction and to the existence of an unbonded brick lined sump with three clayware inlet pipes uphill of the tank.

The other tank lies to the east at GR394524. This tank, now almost buried and reported to have a capacity of 13456 gallons, served an area East and South of the village hall. Both tanks are reported to provide good headroom once inside.

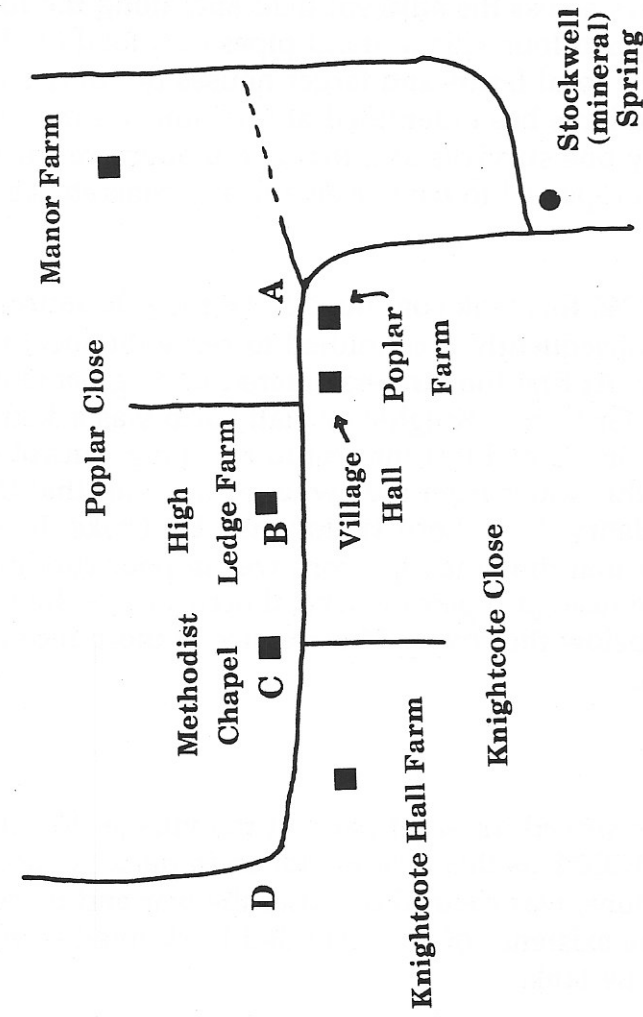
Although some of the larger houses and farms had their own taps, the villagers drew water from public stand pipes or a standpipe that was shared with a neighbour. Only a few of these stand pipes survive and only one standpipe - in top street - is understood to have a shelter similar to those provided in Knightcote.

Northend also had to contend with an additional problem when there was a water shortage. The lie of the land resulted in the bottom of the village getting a better supply than those closer to the tanks - the water ran straight past the first houses and farms.

The Knightcote Water Supply



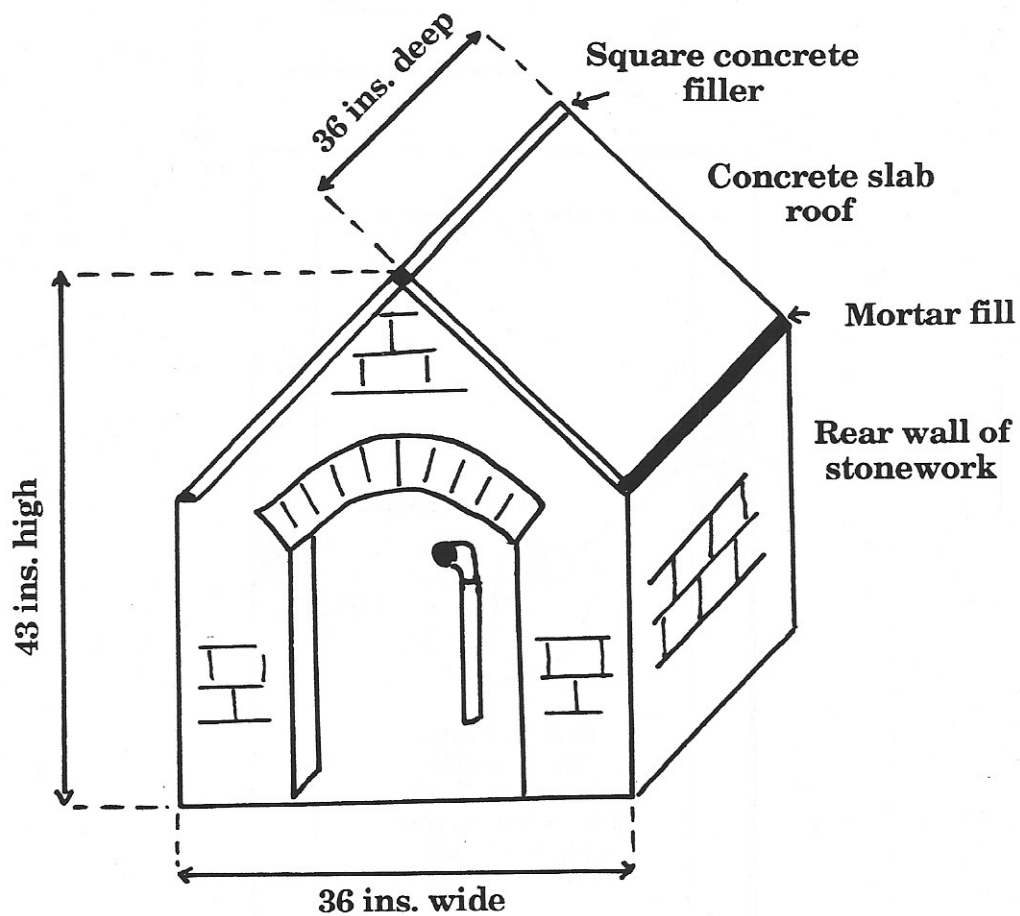
Knightcote



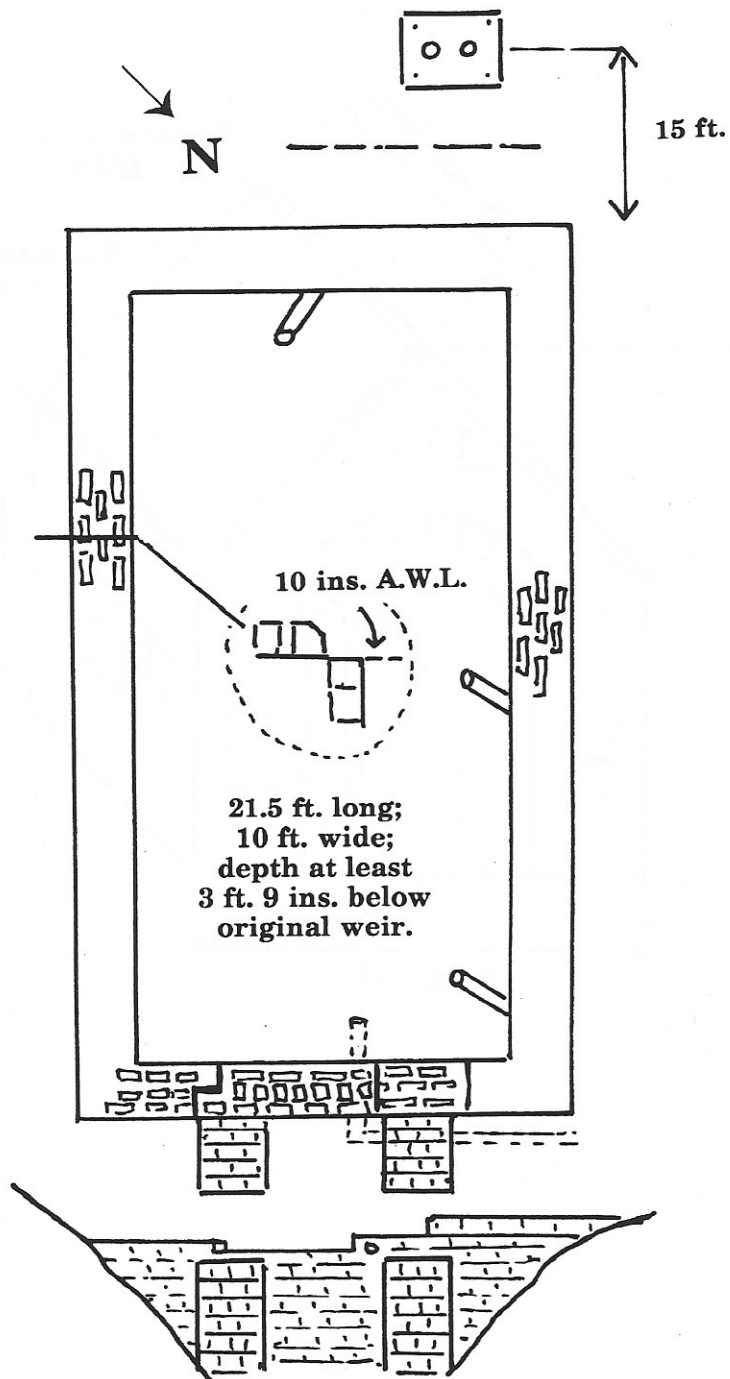
A: The Knightcote Kennel

B C D: Water sources marked on early O.S. maps, but no evidence remaining.

The Knightcote Kennel



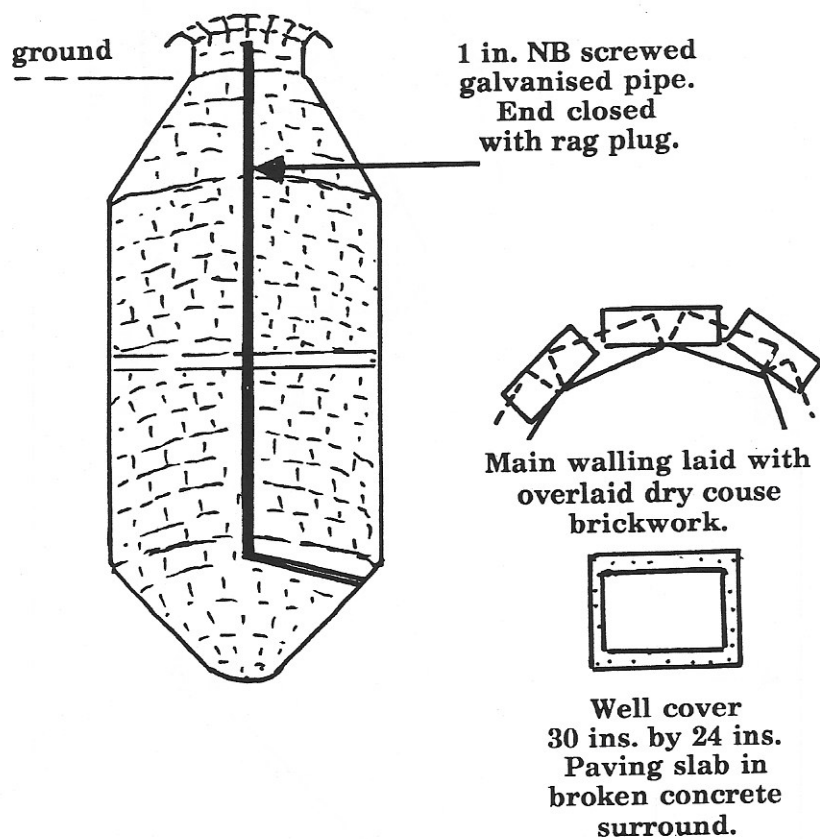
The Knightcote Tank



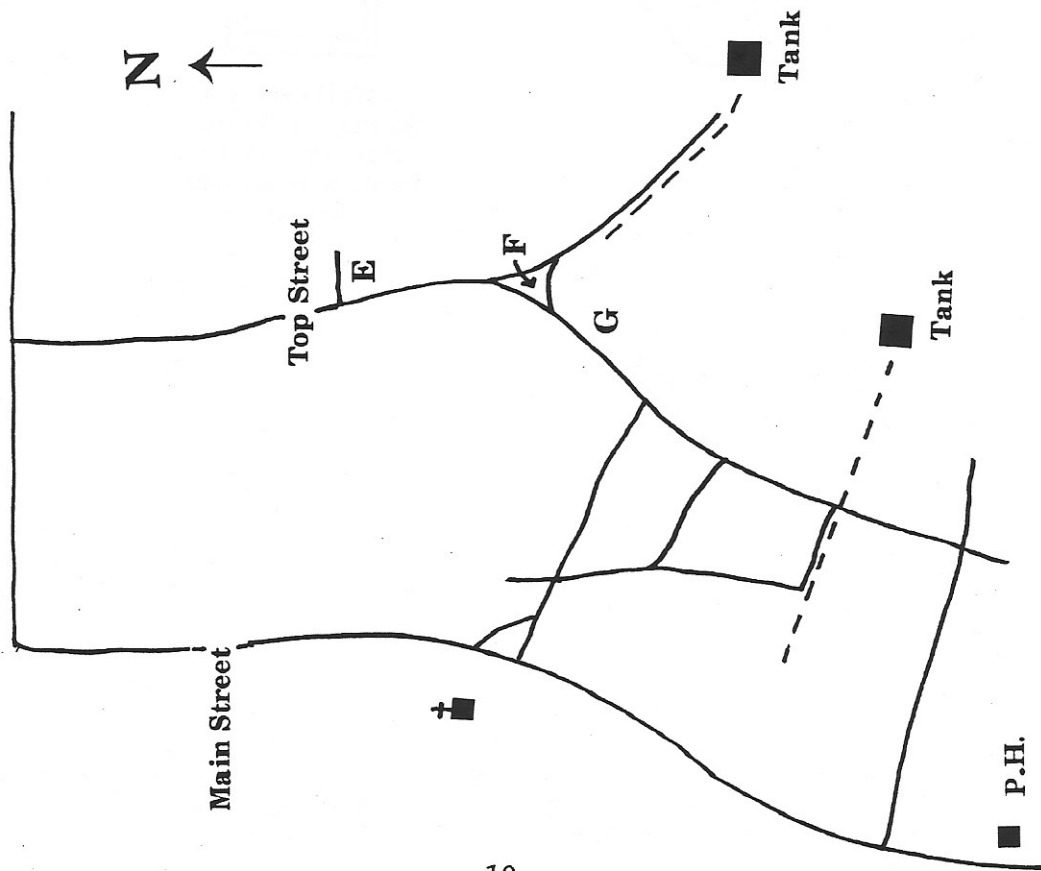
New Covert Brick lined Well

Brick-lined well of unknown origin. Diameter approx. 44 ins tapering in 6 brick courses to 23 ins. diameter and finishing with two courses of equal diameter to just above ground level.

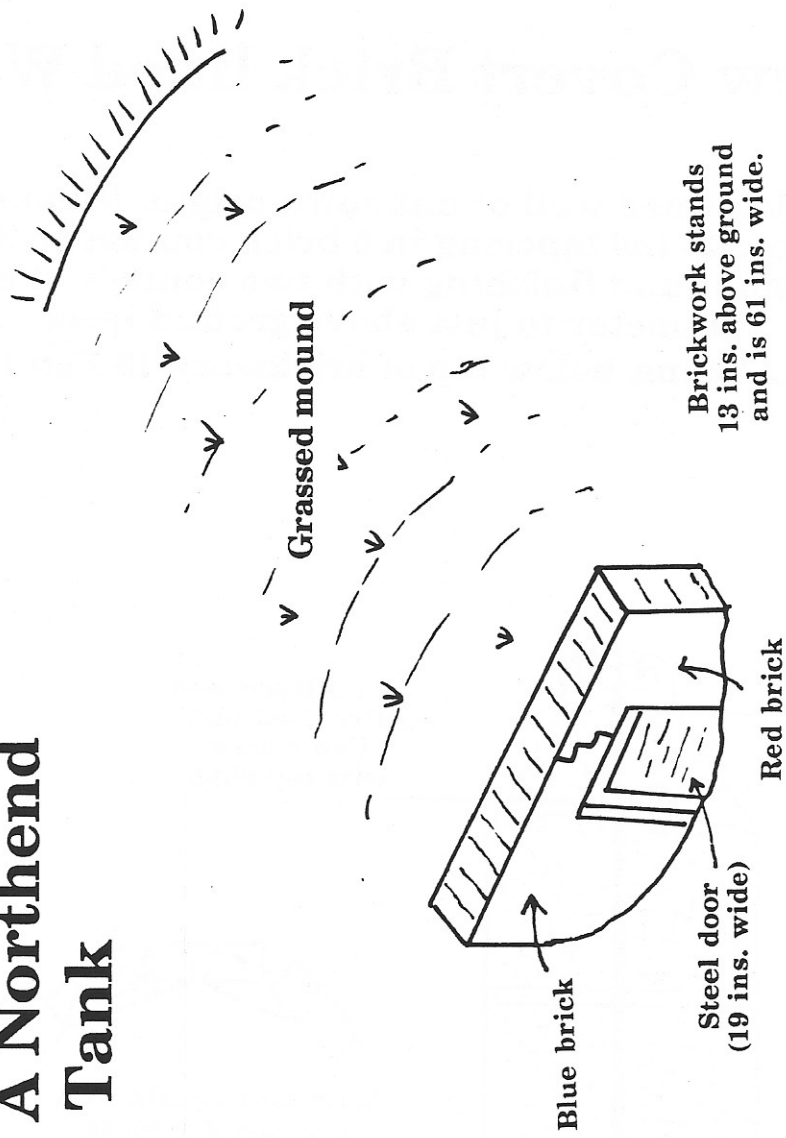
W.L. 92 ins. below top of brickwork 13 Feb 1995



Northend



A Northend Tank



--- Likely route of outlet pipe

E F G: Water sources marked on early O.S. maps, but no evidence remaining.

CHAPTER THREE

NORTONS CLOSE - NORTHEND - (GR392524)

The first houses were built in Nortons Close shortly before the last war. To provide water Southam Rural District Council (SRDC) sank a new borehole close behind, and a little below, the new houses. The water was pumped, by electricity, about 100m up the hill to a new concrete storage tank. The water then gravitated down to the houses.

Of the pumphouses all that remains is a short length of pipework close by the ditch but the storage tank can still be seen beside the footpath and just outside the country park.

To build the houses a small pond was drained. The council was to discover that some households had been drawing water directly from this pond and thus were none too pleased to lose their supply.

This water supply remained in use for about ten years during which time it appears to have been entirely satisfactory - it did not dry up in summer.

It is of interest to include a few edited extracts from the SRDC minutes:-

November 1937

Mr Roselli of the Manor House Northend writes to the SRDC stating that he takes water from the pond that the council now intends to drain for housing. He asks to be connected to the council's new water supply. This is agreed subject to their own requirements being met.

November 1938

A Mr Mould ask to be connected to the council's water supply and repeats this request in July 1939, December 1941 and January 1942.

August 1944

A complaint regarding the shortage of water at Northend School was considered and it was resolved, as a temporary measure, to allow the School Authorities to take a supply from the well at the council houses as long as no inconvenience or shortage of water is caused to the council tenants.

It is not known whether the council houses had inside taps or otherwise. However, the reference to drawing water from 'the well' might indicate an arrangement similar to that known to have been used in Avon Dassett at that time where a cast iron pillar tap was 'disguised' to look like a village pump.

It is not recorded if Mr Mould ever got his water supply but both Northend Manor and the School are some two hundred metres distant from Nortons Close.

CHAPTER FOUR

BURTON DASSETT - THE HOLY WELL - (GR399515)

The hamlet of Burton Dasset lies below the country park on the North Western slopes of the Burton Dasset Hills. Until 1957 the hamlet had no public piped water supply - there were several private wells and water may also have been drawn from the brook and from the Holy Well. Burton Dasset Holy Well stands above the green and close by the Church of All Saints. Although recorded in several texts very little is known of its origins.

The front elevation is some 10 ft. 10 ins. wide and stands 6 ft. 3 ins. above the paved entrance. Four steps lead down to the water which is some 3 ft below the entrance. The well chamber is some 8 ft. 4 ins. deep and 7 ft. 6 ins. wide. There is no obvious inlet or outflow other than a dry inlet pipe at high level which will be referred to again. The water, which is perfectly clear, was some 8 ins. deep when seen in early spring.

There is a dedication on the back wall of the well chamber facing the entrance. There are other inscriptions on the front elevation. Many of these are now eroded and impossible to read but with the help of a drawing found in The Special Illustrated Edition of Beesley's History of Banbury it has proven possible to decipher most of them. The inscriptions, with some comments, are shown on the enclosed sketches.

Inscriptions on the two quadrants appear to have changed since 1860 - not only are the present inscriptions different to those shown by Beesley, but the stonework, where the inscription differs, is in much better condition than elsewhere.

Clearly there are two phases of construction. The monumental entrance dates from a reconstruction of 1860 with the date of the earlier work now uncertain - the date at the back of the well chamber was read as 1634 last century but the author notes that it was difficult to read.

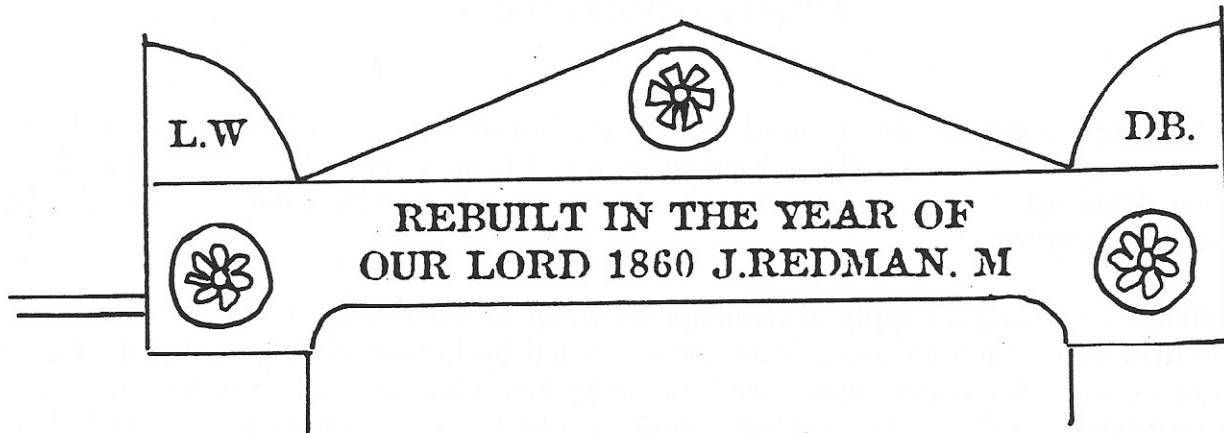
The only evidence that this was a Holy Well is to be found in a newspaper article published in the Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury of 24 August 1918. This reads: "At Burton Dasset - near Kineton - is another well, which in olden times was much used and highly esteemed for the right of Baptism by Immersion." The chamber is certainly well proportioned for this purpose but there is no other evidence to confirm this practice. In modern times Baptism by Immersion is associated only with the Baptist or Anabaptist communities. However, although Anabaptists are reported in Avon Dasset in the late seventeenth century, neither are recorded locally in the mid-nineteenth century.

It has not proven possible to identify any of the initials or to explain the significance of the changing flower rosettes. However, it is possible that the final 'M' in the main inscription could stand for 'Minister'.

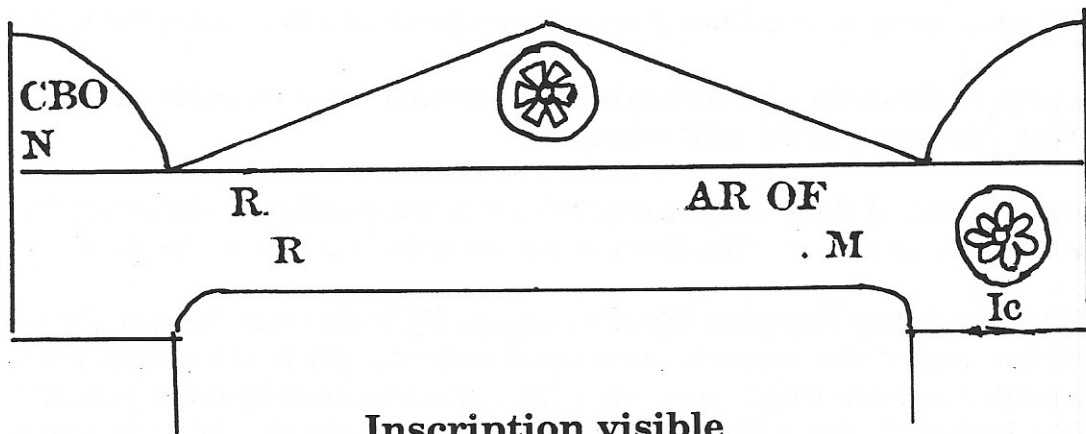
Returning to the inlet - this is no ordinary pipe. It can be seen high up at the very back of the well chamber and probably dates from the 1860 reconstruction. It is a well crafted four inch bore split stone pipe with a hexagonal outer surface. That so much trouble should be taken over an inlet pipe is not easily explained - perhaps baptisms were carried out under running water.

There is free public access to the Holy Well which stands on land only recently acquired by the Church. The serious visitor should take Wellington boots and a torch!

The Holy Well at Burton Dassett



Main Inscription
as shown by Beesley



Inscription visible
1995

Inscription from back of Well Chamber

THE · YEARE
OF OVR · LORD
/P ○ 34 X

Notes:

- 'L' from Lord lost.
- The first two figures lost from date.
- /P may not be complete.

CHAPTER FIVE

FENNY COMPTON

Fenny Compton lies, on low ground, East of the Burton Dassett Hills and well below the spring line. In past times the village drew all its water from a brook that, fed by permanent springs, never dried up. As a consequence wells, so common in nearby villages, are not to be found in Fenny Compton.

Originally providing a supply of clean spring water to the village, by the 1840s the brook had become little more than an open drain contaminated by human and animal filth. The first efforts to improve the water supply were made by Rev. Charles Abel Heurtley shortly after his appointment to the parish in 1840. This involved the construction of a covered drain to convey clean water through the village. The drain started in Mr Richardson's plantation about the village and ran for 1184 yards probably ending at, or just beyond, Brook Street. Three pumps were provided to draw water from the drain but their location is now lost and no physical evidence of this earliest improvement to the village's water supply has been found.

The works were funded by public subscription and some of the accounts have survived. From these incomplete records it is clear that total subscriptions were not less than £87.15s.3d. Invoices, and receipts, date the work to 1841/2. The only invoices for materials relate to the construction of the three wells (pumps). We have no details of the drain - logically the cover would be of stone slabs or wood but there is no evidence of either about the village.

The start of the drain - Mr Richardson's Plantation - was probably the woodland shown as Home Park Plantation in the 1904 survey.

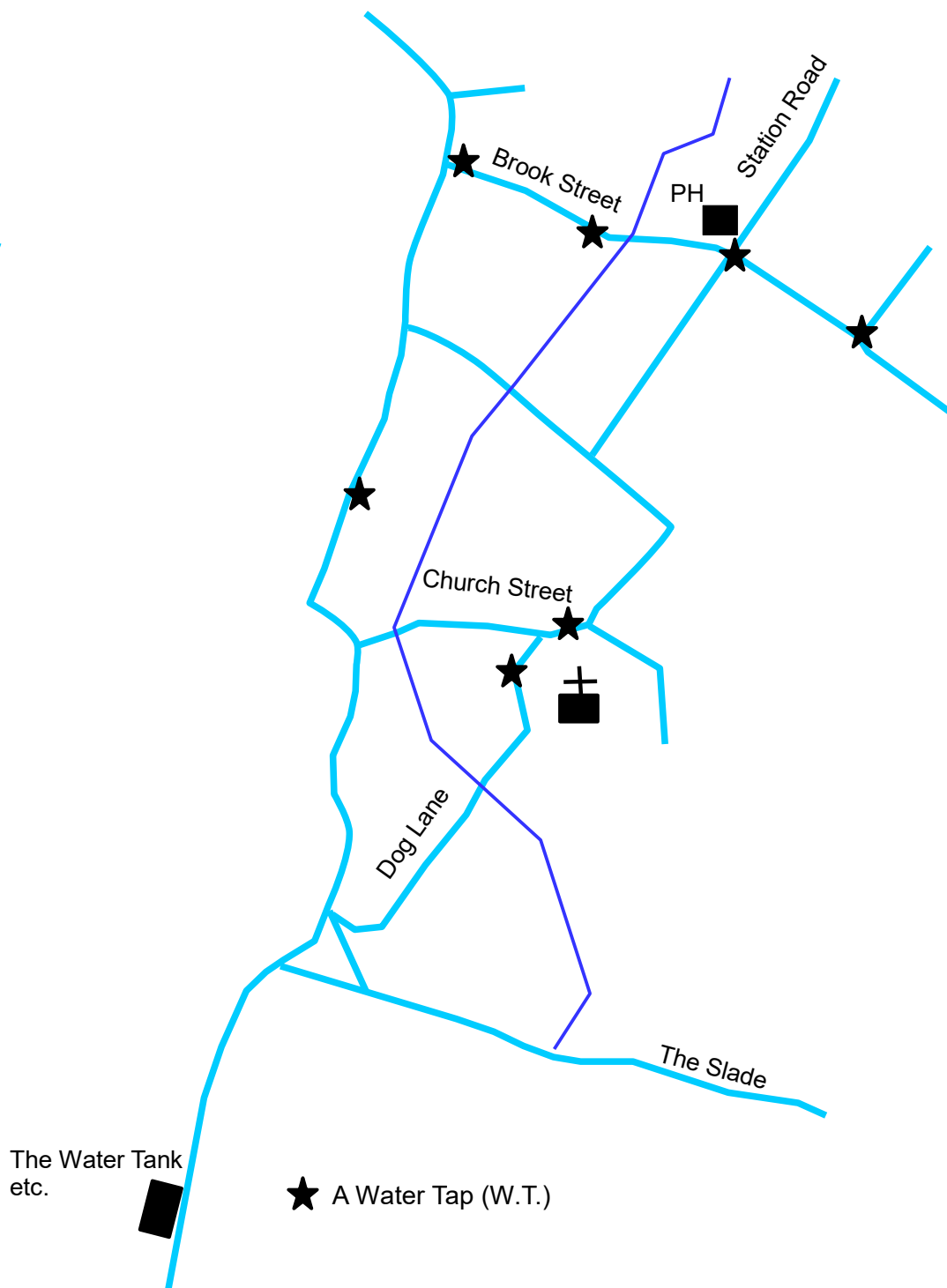
It is not known if these earliest improvements were initially satisfactory but by the 1860s they certainly were not - "the drain was often out of order and the water polluted."

In 1866, the Fenny Compton Water Company (FCWCo.) was formed. By selling 150 £2 shares sufficient capital was raised to lay a piped water supply to the village. Underground water was tapped at Tight Head above the village and conveyed by underground pipework to storage tanks beside the Avon Dassett Road. From there water was taken into many of the larger houses whilst communal standpipes (or fountains) were provided for the others. The 1904 Survey shows six water taps about the village - taps almost certainly provided by the FCWCo. Of these five can still be found - two now within distinctive brick shelters.

Initially it appears that the villagers were well pleased with their new water supply and the company was financially successful apparently paying a dividend of 5% from start-up to the 1920s. This was not to continue and the last dividend appears to have been paid in 1930.

A Plan of Fenny Compton

Showing the Location of All Public Water Taps
Both Those Seen in 1995 or Recorded in 1904



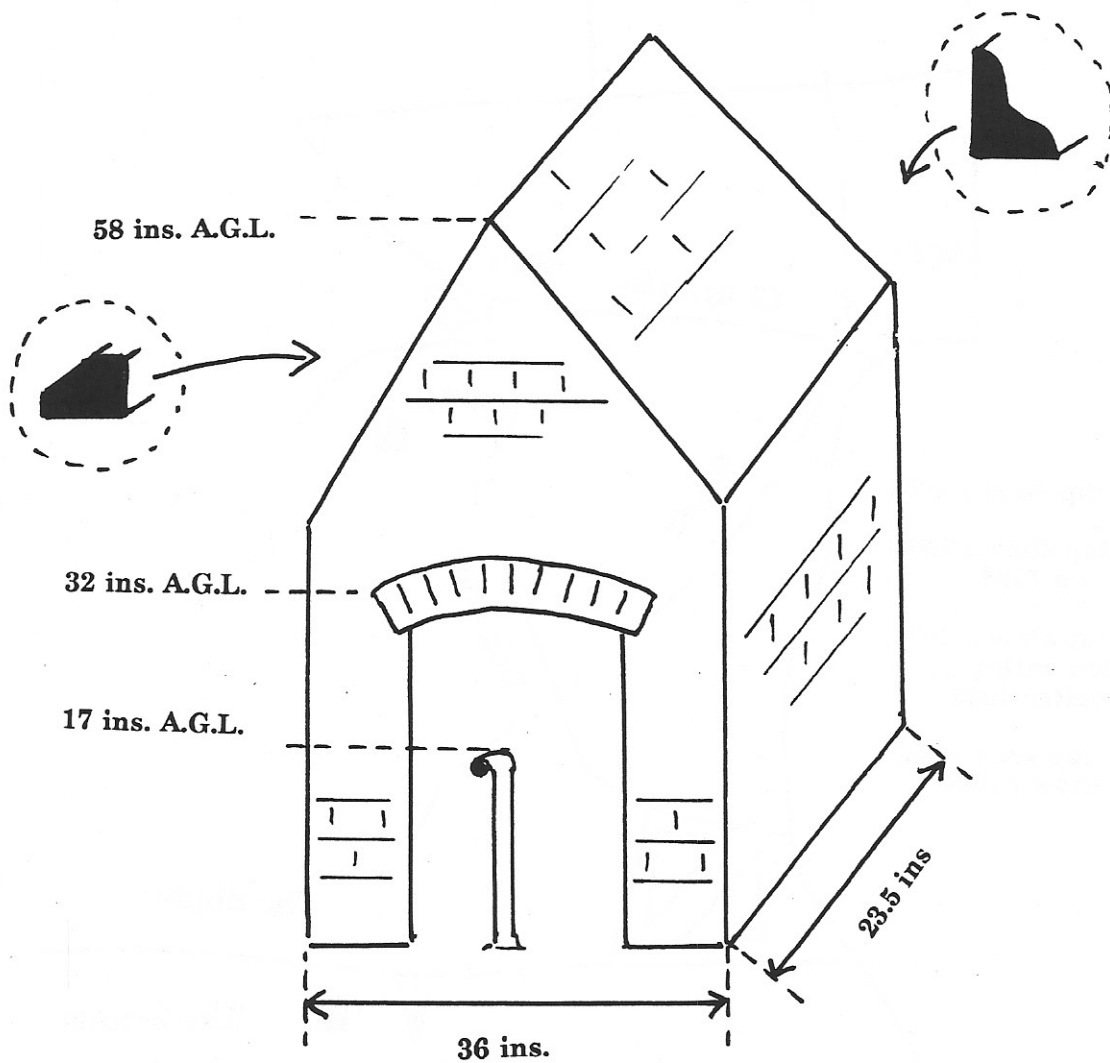
This plan was revised and redrawn in 2020.
John Brace

Fenny Compton

Standpipe Shelter at Brook Street/Northend Road

Originally of red brick construction this shelter has been repaired using blue brick.

Of special interest is the profiled brick used for the original roof.



The pre-war years found the village of Fenny Compton very short of water with both the company, and the SRDC, under increasing pressure to improve the supply. In 1938, the SRDC minutes include the following:

"A letter was read from the Fenny Compton Water company giving limited particulars as to the supply, stating that during the drought the pipeline had been continuously inspected for signs of leakage and none discovered, and that they found it necessary, in the interests of consumers, to ration the supply, and had always endeavoured to give a larger number of hours supply than the stated advertised times.'

Shortly after this, the company commissioned a report on 'Augmenting the Water Supply' from Messrs G. Rinis Mons Ltd.. The report, and its recommendations, are now lost but the FCWCo. clearly found it impossible to accept these for by the 6th. of June 1939 they had written to Southam Rural district Council (SRDC) that they were "desirous of disposing of the undertaking" (to SRDC). This was discussed at the July meeting of the Council when their consultant - Mr. Sholto Douglas - reported that the proposed works for augmenting the supply would cost an estimated £600. He also reported that the total cost of all the works owned by the FCWCo., including repairs and renewals over 73 years was considerably less than £750 with no allowance for depreciation. He suggested that a fair price for the company would be £500.

The RDC did not at that time proceed with the proposed purchase of the FCWCo..

Although 1940 saw the construction of a pond in Hall Field to provide water for fire-fighting it was not until the severe drought of 1947 - when in April of that year "the supply was still turned off every night - that the SRDC looked again at purchasing the FCWCo.. They commissioned a new report from Mr. Sholto Douglas which was considered at the August committee meeting. The details of this proposal are again lost but the total cost of acquiring the FCWCo. and augmenting the supply was estimated at £3500. The committee was keen to proceed with an enlarged scheme that included extensions to serve Brook Street and Station Road at an additional cost of £800. The enlarged scheme was approved by the full council and submitted to the Ministry of health for grant approval. This was not forthcoming. The problem lay with the cost of purchasing the FCWCo., for which the company were now asking £877.

Negotiations continued into 1949 and then 1950 with the FCWCo. rejecting the council's final offer of £500 in June of that year. In October the water company had second thoughts and indicated its readiness to accept £500 but by then the council had lost interest - it was pursuing its own Southern Area Water Scheme to bring water to the village.

The new mains water supply did not reach Fenny Compton until July 1957. Even then a hosepipe ban was imposed - a ban that was not lifted until 10th. September. Whilst waiting for the arrival of mains water the villagers remained completely dependent on the FCWCo, which was, of course, disinclined to undertake any improvement works. In despair, the water company wrote to the SRDC in July 1951 to the effect that they "were considering winding up."

Not every household took mains water when it became available from July 1957. The owner had to meet the cost of connecting to the council's stop cock and the council's water rate was higher than that charged by the FCWCo.. Small wonder then that many households refused the council's supply and continued with the FCWCo..

The information provided by Mr. Sholto Douglas to the effect that the total cost of the works - including repairs and renewals - was less than £750 in 1939 supports other evidence to the effect that the company never undertook major new works or improvements from its start up until modern times. The failure to meet the demand in pre- and post-war years appears, in small measure, to have been due to frequent failures of the underground pipework which by 1940 was some 74 years old.

Underground problems brought the company to its knees in 1976 when it was saved from closure only by a co-operative effort by the consumers who set up a volunteer working party to repair the leaking pipework and who agreed to an immediate doubling of the water rate which typically rose from £10 to £20 per annum.

In modern times the company found it difficult to meet its obligations to supply clean water. Several times the tanks were cleaned. Finally in 1978, under the threat of legal action, a chlorination plant was installed

The number of houses supplied by the FCWCo. in the early years is not known. In the 1920s they apparently supplied 65 houses from an 8000 gallon storage tank. By 1976, the number of consumers had fallen to 39 and by 1994 to just over 20.

Appendix 1: An extract from "A SHORT LIFE of CHARLES ABEL HEURTLEY" (probably by T.H.Fowler about 1920)

"When he first became rector, there was no other water in the village than what was procured from a brook that ran through it, and, of course, received continual accessions of impurity on its way. A temporary arrangement at first conveyed the water in a covered drain from one end of the village to another, with pumps placed at convenient intervals. But still the water often got polluted, and the drains out of order. Fever was very frequent. When the alarm of Cholera in England arose, it was determined to catch the water at its source before it actually fell into the brook. happily the spring rose at a height considerably above the village, not further distant than three-quarters of a mile. It was copious and had never been known to fail. The difficulty was about the funds. This was surmounted by the formation of a water company, limited, with shares of £2 each. The shares were all taken up within the parish, two of the leading farmers, Mr. Reading and Mr. Knott, cordially co-operating, and the rector himself taking fifty shares. The water is conveyed in pipes to a tank still considerably above the village, and thence throughout the village, in a good many instances into the houses, not seldom into the cottages, and at intervals into covered fountains in the open street. The principal houses pay from five shillings to twenty shillings a year, and financially the scheme proved a success, as the shareholders have received five per cent on their capital since it was started.

The health of the village was materially improved by this wise plan of sanitary engineering."

Appendix 2: Extracts from the Accounts of the 1841 Improvements

"For laying drain from Mr. Reading's plantation about the village to serve the village with water 1184 yards. Labour and material £44.8s.0d."

"For sinking three wells in the village and walling the same and laying gutter stone again.

The pumps, labour and all materials 45 shillings each.

A mason and labourer four days each chipping stones and building wall back (hide) and pumps and again the (kerb) lion £1.0s.0d."

The accounts also show that £44.1s.8d was paid to a Mr. Reading for labour and pumps whilst the subscriptions are shown as £87.15s.3d.

Appendix 3: Connection Charges for Water - SRDC April 1956

"That for domestic and farmhouse supplies, communication pipes be laid free of charge up to the curtilage of the applicant's property, provided that this does not exceed a distance of 50ft., beyond which a charge shall be made for the cost of labour and materials.

Applications for free connections must be made within three months of the council's offer - after which date full cost of the laying of the communication pipe will be charged.

That the consumer be liable for water charges within one month

- a. of the communication pipes being laid
- b. of the water supply being available

whichever is the later."

CHAPTER SIX

AVON DASSETT

Avon Dasset lies on the Western slope of the Burton Dasset Hills. The village lies below the natural spring line which crosses the Fenny Compton road above the church of St. John the Baptist where a hand pump can still be seen. This pump was used not only by the cottages nearby but also by farms on the high ground above the village. Many wells can still be seen about the village and these, together with others that are now lost, were the principal source of domestic water until the end of the last century. By the mid twentieth century the village had piped water from at least three, and perhaps four separate sources. With also some evidence pointing towards the existence of another piped supply that fell into disuse before the last war, Avon Dasset's water supply is the most complex, and least recorded, of the villages under the Burton Dasset Hills.

The earliest evidence of a piped water supply in Avon Dasset is the stone edifice on the Green which, in past times, sheltered a communal water tap or fountain. Originally with a gated entrance, both the gate and tap are now lost - all that can be seen is the end of a lead pipe. When it was constructed - and by whom - is not known and it is not clear where the water came from. With no local recollection of it being used it is likely to have fallen into disuse before the last war.

The first council houses were built before the last war to the north of the Village Green. The houses did not have an inside tap - the tenants got their water from a single pillar tap that stood close by the Green and near the earlier village tap which may well have fallen into disuse at about this time. The pillar tap is reported as having a cast iron fluted column with the tap operated by a lever mechanism that included a large ball. This tap was almost certainly fed from the 'village tank'.

The 'village tank' lies some 550m. northeast of the Prince Rupert public house at GR416504. This is a substantial double compartment tank of brick and concrete and has the remains of a vaulted corrugated iron roof. An inscription dates the tank to 1900, although there is reference to a 'village tank' and a 'water company' in October 1899. The conflicting dates suggest one of three possibilities:

1. that the present tank was constructed in 1900 to replace an earlier tank. This explanation is partly supported by earlier maps. The first detailed survey made in the 1880s shows features that might be interpreted as an earlier tank, or well, close by, but no physical evidence has been found to support this.
2. that the construction of the tank was under way in October 1899, but not complete until 1900.
3. that some reconstruction, or improvement, was undertaken in 1900.

Whatever the explanation, the present tank was built to receive only spring water which was collected in underground pipework. The original tank inlet has been replaced by a galvanised steel spout which, although now dry, is still in good condition. Nothing is known of the design of the collection pipework. There is no physical evidence of any collection chamber, or sump, on the inlet and also no evidence of any valving. The run of the outlet pipe is uncertain. The tank is well positioned to serve the lower parts of the village but is not high enough up the hill to serve Bitham Hall or houses at the top end of the main street.

Ploughing in the autumn of 1994 exposed a small screwed steel pipe, rusty but otherwise in fairly good condition, running away from the tank and along the field headland towards the village. Another section of similar pipework can be seen lying in the tank. This pipe is unlikely to have been the main outlet pipe as it is too small. It may have been some secondary outlet but several features suggest that it was a supply pipe added after the original construction.

The village has two great houses - Bitham Hall and Avon Carrow. Avon Carrow was built at the end of the last century complete with its own private water supply which was pumped from a borehole above the village. Built of stone and in a similar style as Avon Carrow, the pumphouse can still be seen to the north of the Fenny Compton road at GR412507. An oil engine was run as required to fill a header tank in the pumphouse which was at sufficient height for the water to then gravitate to the village. At some time after 1925 a wind pump was added. The pumping engine was a single cylinder Rushton Hornby Oil Engine which was hand-started after first warming the cylinder head with a blow lamp.

Long after the private supply had been abandoned in favour of mains water, Avon Carrow was found to have several large lead-lined water tanks in the roof space. Almost certainly holding several days supply for the household, it is not clear whether these were original or added later in response to the severe water shortages of the twentieth century that will be referred to later.

From the pumphouse the water would have followed the public road into Avon Dassett. During negotiations for the sale of the property in 1925/6, the vendor's solicitors were unable to confirm that the owners had any legal right to run the pipe alongside, or across, the road or had any right of access for maintenance. All they could say was that the "right to maintenance access had never been questioned."

In 1913 the Avon Carrow water supply was extended to Bitham Hall. This appears to have quickly fallen into disuse for in the two years up to Lady Day 1926 no water had been taken, or paid for. A solicitors' letter of 1926 refers to a pump house at Bitham Hall. However, the context in which this letter appears suggests some confusion - it may have been intended to refer to the Avon Carrow pump house.

In 1925 the Avon Carrow water was piped to several properties on, and adjacent to, the estate as follows:

- The gardener's cottage.

- A small cottage adjoining the drive (Mrs. Amy Smith).

- A small residence, or hunting box, facing the village street.

- A stone built cottage and blacksmith's shop (Mr. Spike).

- The village post office - company water tap in garden.

- Feeding land leased by a Mr. Wadland.

The second great house in Avon Dassett is Bitham Hall. Bitham Hall is built about the spring line and exploited the water in several ways.

Firstly, domestic water was obtained from a dipping well reached via steps and a deep cutting from the back of the house. This well shows two stages of construction - the entrance and the chamber being in good brick whilst the back of the chamber, which includes a small recess, is in stone. Likely to have held some object the recess is now empty save as a nesting site for birds. The water level is below the entrance and some twelve feet below the natural ground level. No evidence has been found of any steps leading down to the water but these could have disappeared under the debris of many years.

A little further along the hillside a series of stone-lined tanks are filled with spring water. One of these tanks is a fish or ornamental pond, whilst the others are inside the greenhouses. In the greenhouses, handpumps were used to draw water from these tanks as required.

Finally, spring water fills a lake below the house - a lake that some claim to be the source of the river Dene.

Although Bitham Hall was connected to the Avon Carrow water supply in, or shortly after, 1913, this connection appears to have been abandoned before 1925. As it is unlikely that the owners would have voluntarily reverted to drawing water from the dipping well this suggests that they had made some other arrangements to provide water to the house. The new arrangements could have included the pumping station referred to in the Avon Carrow documents, but that document is unconvincing and local recollections of a pumping station in the grounds of Bitham Hall are ambiguous. An outbuilding has been found that did contain some form of machinery, but if this was a pumping station no evidence remains of either the pumping equipment or of a water storage tank.

1928 saw the publication of the following details of the Avon Dassett water supplies:

"The village is supplied by an undertaking belonging to the Avon Dassett Water Company. The source of supply is a spring from the Middle Lias at Bitham Hall. The average daily quantity of water supplied is 4500 gallons. Contains some iron. Avon Carrow Mansion - supplied from a well in the Middle Lias."

The Avon Dassett Water Company (ADWCo.) was not a public company and details of its formation and ownership are lost. We only have the name of the last Company Secretary - Mrs. A. Worrell.

Few other references to the company have been found and none give much insight into its operations. The reference of 1899 is found in the Parish Council minutes when it was proposed that the village tank should be connected to the new Avon Carrow water supply so as to "augment the village supply in time of need." It is not known if this suggestion was taken up by the water company at that time, but the exposed pipework suggests that a supplementary supply of water was taken to the tank some time after its construction - water that could just as easily have originated from the Avon Carrow supply as from any independent pumphouse at Bitham Hall.

The demand for water exceeded the supply long before 1957. References to water shortages have been found in October 1929 and October 1944. Subsequently, frequent references are made to water shortages, and in 1948 it was recorded that "the ADWCo. had been obliged to restrict the use of water in the village to drinking and essential purposes." As in Northend, when water was short, the lower parts of the village naturally got a better supply than the top, but in Avon Dassett the shortages were shared out by alternately shutting off the supply to one end of the village or the other.

In 1949 the SRDC was considering taking over the ADWCo., but it is not clear what, if any, plans they had for improving the supply in the short term for Avon Dassett did not appear in the contemporary list of parishes in which the SRDC was proposing to sink new bore holes.

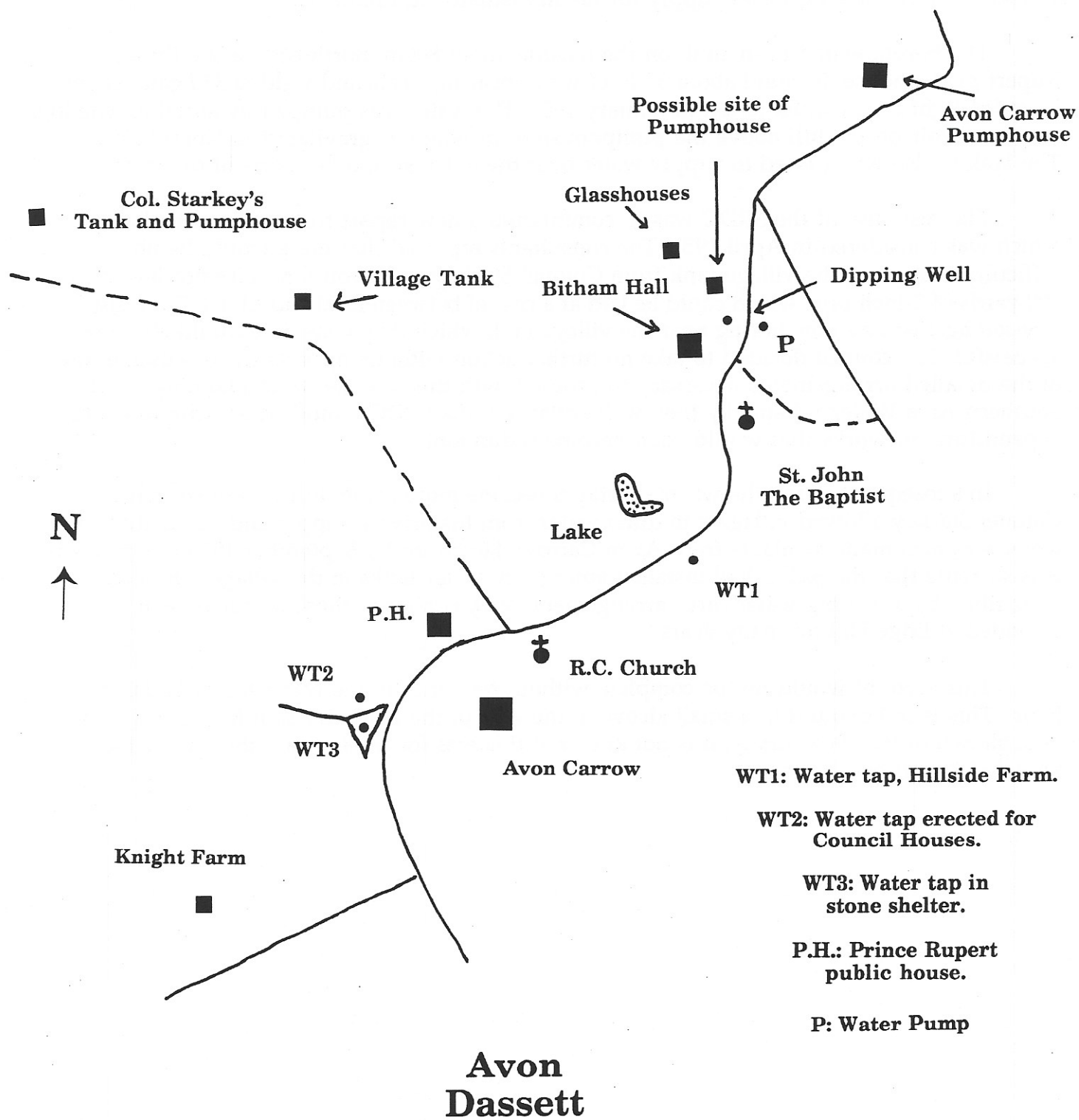
The parish council continued to press the SRDC for action and in January 1951 reported that "Colonel J.H.Starkey had recently caused a borehole to be sunk in the village which had yielded a more than sufficient supply for his immediate requirements."

The borehole had been sunk on the hillside about 800m. north-east of the Prince Rupert public house. It found about 30 ft. of water-bearing strata and yielded 350 gallons per hour for eight hours when tested in January 1950. The water was pumped by an oil engine to a new reservoir on the hill above the pumphouse from where it gravitated to Knight Farm. The tank is also well placed to supply water over the hillcrest to other parts of the farm.

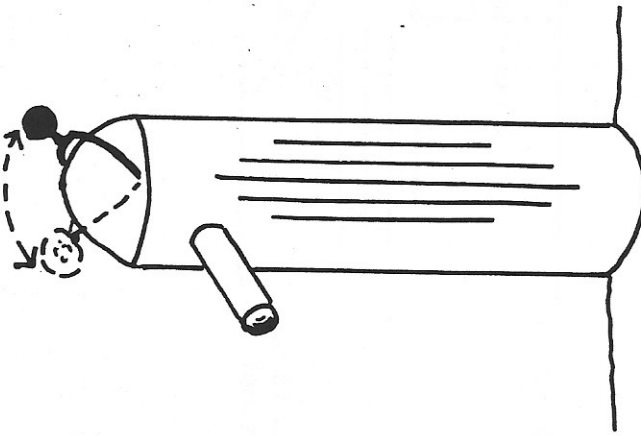
The response of the SRDC was to commission a new report from their consultants which was considered in April 1951. The consultants reported that there would be no difficulty in feeding the village tank from Colonel Starkey's - it would require not less than 900 yards of 2-inch pipe which could be laid at a cost of between £750 and £1000. They also advised against any new boring near the village tank which they considered unlikely to be successful. The council decided to take no further action without, apparently, discussing any of the detailed arrangements necessary to proceed with this scheme. With planning for the Southern Area Water Scheme by then well advanced, the SRDC would be seeking to avoid expenditure on works that would soon become redundant.

In subsequent years, the water shortages became more acute. In times of shortage Colonel Starkey allowed villagers to draw water from his private supply and no doubt some water was also made available from Avon Carrow. However, by September 1956 the problem was so acute that the SRDC had installed emergency water tanks in the village. These tanks were filled by a visiting water cart - arrangements very similar to those that had been provided at Edge Hill for many years.

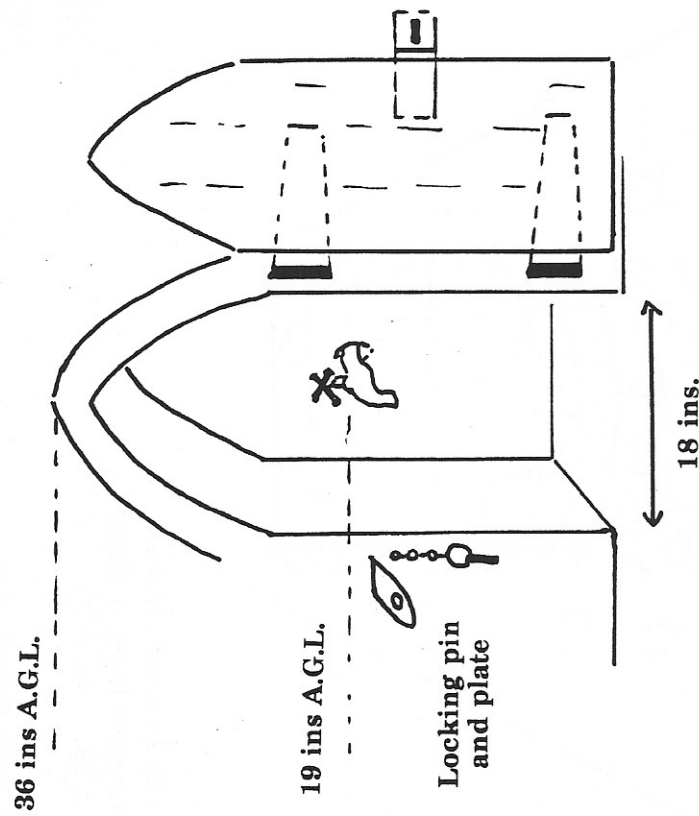
This account would not be complete without reference to the water tap at Hillside Farm. This is to be found in a small alcove in the wall of the old dairy unit facing the road. First shown in the 1904 survey, it is not known if this was for public use - there is no local knowledge of it being used.



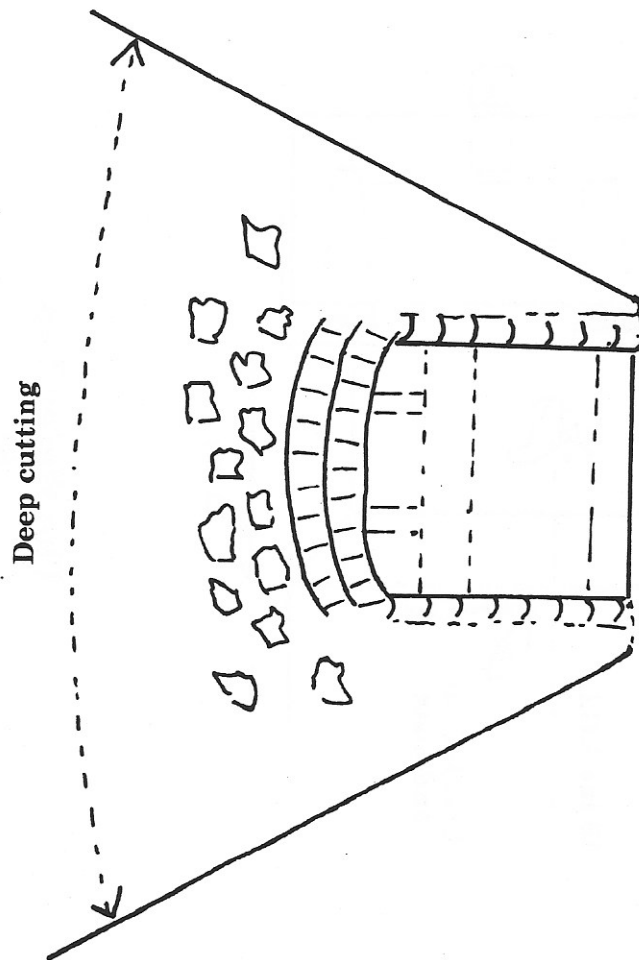
Avon Dassett



A likeness of the
pillar tap
for the
Council Houses



The Water Tap
at
Hillside Farm,
Avon Dassett.



The well is approached by steps and then a deep cutting into the hillside.

The well chamber is 27 ins. wide by 53 ins. deep (to front face) and 49 ins high (to water level)

Backwall detail

49 ins. A.W.L.

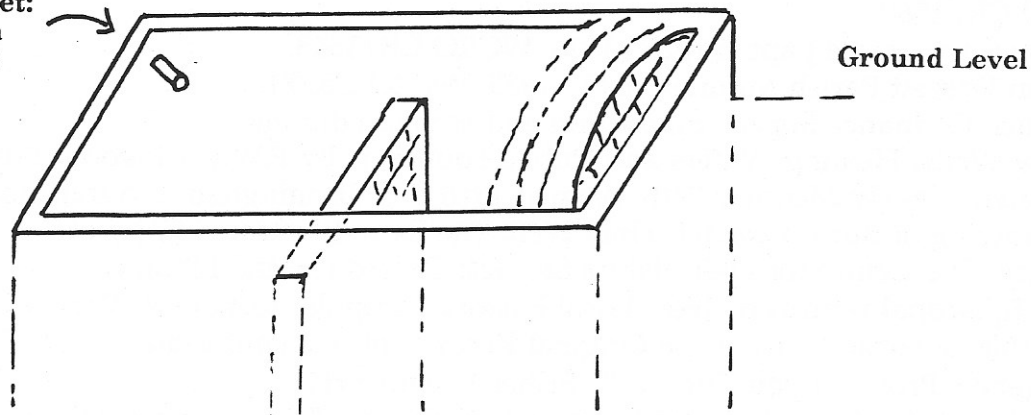
8 ins.

Rough boundary between stone and brick

W.L. approx 12 ft. below ground

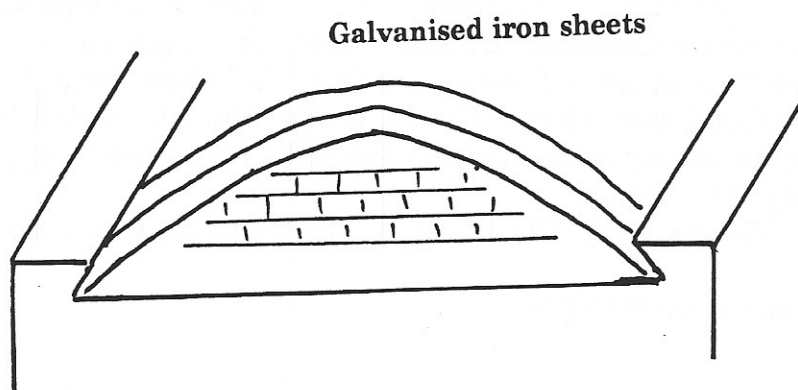
Bitham Hall Dipping Well

Nom. 1.5 ins. inlet:
dry when seen
1994 and 1995



Double Compartment Tank

Approx 18 ft. by 8 ft.



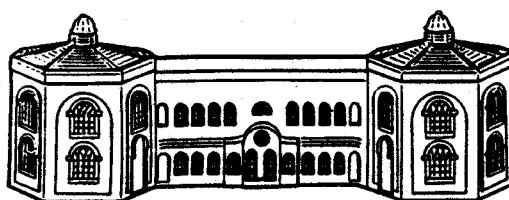
End section shows roofing
sheets located in the
pre-formed notches.

The Village Tank

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WCRO: Warwick County Record Office.



This pamphlet is published by the Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society

Industrial Archaeology is the study, recording and preservation of the remains of our industrial past. The Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society was formed in 1989 to stimulate interest in the subject generally, and to specifically contribute to the understanding and recording of the range of activities that make up the industrial archaeology of Warwickshire.

The Society holds a monthly meeting and also contributes to a national initiative - the Index Record for Industrial Sites (IRIS) - which is seeking to carry out a systematic survey of all industrial archaeology sites in England.

As well as occasional papers, the Society produces a newsletter/journal - 'Retort!' - and this is free to members.

The Society is full of enthusiasts from a range of different backgrounds, many of whom simply enjoy the monthly meetings, whilst others seek to become more heavily involved in the activities of the Society.

Details of the Society - and further copies of 'Seven Springs' - may be obtained from:

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