



25p

# Warwickshire Industrial Archaeology Society

## 'THE WARWICK WATERHOUSES'

In 1693 a John Hopkins, of Birmingham, started an enterprise for supplying the inhabitants of Warwick with water from the Priory Pools just to the North and East of the town. He converted an old mill to pump water to a 'waterhouse' which he had built on a plot of land measuring not more than 20 yards by 16 yards at the North end of Sheep St. (now Northgate) where there is now a traffic island. The 'waterhouse' included a tank, or cisterns, that were filled from the pools with the houses being connected to the cistern by underground pipework. The works were, at least, substantially complete by the following year as water taps are recorded amongst the losses suffered in The Great Fire of Warwick. Whether the new water supply was then used for fire fighting is not known but subsequently the 'Aldermen' of the town acquired the right to break into the pipes in case of fire. The street plan of Warwick dated 1711 shows the 'waterhouse' to be a substantial, probably stone, building but no other details have been found. Clearly the 'tank' or 'cistern' must have been above ground level if water was to reach the better houses in the highest parts of the town.

Finding that the 'engines' did not supply sufficient water the original mills were demolished and new buildings and machinery installed about 1703. In the later half of the 18th century the undertaking was in the hands of the Valetine Cooks who had a new 'waterhouse' built about 100 meters to the East of the original on a site which is now part of the car park of 'The Punch Bowl' public house. This second site is lower than the first and so the cistern must have been raised well above ground level to serve the highest parts of the town - truly a water tower but one of which we have no details.

The now redundant 'waterhouse', at the end of sheep street was first converted into dwellings. However in 1774 these being 'declared a public nuisance' they were purchased, for £120, with the express intention of having them pulled down. Certainly the site was cleared by 1786.

In 1781 the water engine, and the corn mill that shared the same building, were declared to be in a 'Very ruinous state so as to not admit repair'. The report continues to give the daily flow of water at the mill to be 2,700 hogsheads<sup>1</sup> and perhaps twice that in winter. It also gives the head as 18 feet. Subsequently the Priory Mills were demolished to be replaced by new buildings and machinery - work that was in hand in 1782 and complete by 1784.

In 1802 the undertaking was purchased by a Mr. Wise for £1800. The new proprietor does not appear to have made any substantial additional investment in the undertaking so that by 1849 they were again reported to be in poor condition with the mill ponds nearly choked by mud and rushes. The quality of the water was now also poor being much polluted by excrement and refuse principally arising from 'The Cape'.

<sup>1</sup> A Hogshead was an elastic measure of volume that could be as little as 50 gallons or as many as 140. With the smaller measures usually reserved for spirits 2,700 hogsheads would be about 300,000 gallons.

Sufficient water being available the engines could pump 3,000 gallons per hour for 12 hours six days of the week but the shortage of water in the town was such that the houses, at best, got water for only two days each week and it was not unknown for the water to fail completely in dry weather. Nevertheless some 80 houses, and some public buildings, in the town took water from this undertaking for which the houses paid between 12 and 18 shillings per annum and the fire station £2.

At this time the service tank, or cistern, was reported to be lead lined and to have a capacity of 9,000 gallons. This tank has been reported to have been in Market Street but this may be mistaken for no evidence of such a location is found on the Public Health maps of 1851 which continue to show the 'cistern' or 'waterhouse' at the top of The Butts.

Water continued to be pumped from the Priory pools until 1858 when the new waterworks were opened at Emscote. However some of the wooden water pipes continued in use for many years longer- certainly some were still in use in 1876.

Research continues.

John Brace August 1996.

#### Sources.

1. The 'Wise' papers. W.R.O. CR 26/1(5).
2. A Victoria County History of Warwick Vol. VIII p441.
3. Seven Trent Water - A Review of the Undertaking Innes Jones 1974.
4. Exhibit of wooden water pipe from Warwick - St. Johns Museum.
5. Photograph of the removal of wooden water pipes in Warwick - County Museum Archives.
6. Map of 1711 by Messers Fish and Bridgeman. W.R.O.
7. Map of 1786. W.R.O.
8. Map of 1806 W.R.O.
9. The Warwick Public Health Maps of 1851. W.R.O.
10. The Haseley Water Supply. E Pritchard 1876. Warwick Library Local History Pamphlet Section.
11. The County Sites and Monuments Record - WA 2194
12. Corporation minutes 10 December 1844. W.R.O. CR 1618/W3/2
13. Warwick Advertiser 27 March 1852.
14. Private Sources.

