

## Dummer – water supply

Dummer, being situated on chalk, had natural springs described in the 19th century as giving a reliable and adequate fresh water supply. The inhabitants benefitted from private and communal wells in addition to the village pond, probably man-made. Farms had their own wells and dug their own ponds.<sup>1</sup>

In his diaries Stephen Terry (d. 1867), squire of Dummer recalled a well house in a paddock adjoining Dummer House protecting a great well, 9ft. (2.7m.) in diameter, and sunk 360ft. (110m.) into the chalk with a wooden bucket holding 60 gallons. The water level was generally 30-40ft. (9-12m.) deep and was drawn up by a great wheel worked by a donkey – sometimes with a man who walked beside it.<sup>2</sup> A much later map of 1926 shows a well at Tower Hill Farm and communal wells in Up Street and Down Street.<sup>3</sup>

The Down Street well was constructed in 1879. It is of unusual construction with a treadwheel within a well house (Fig. 1), now Grade II Listed. The wheel is 10ft. (3m.) diameter with 14ins. (35cm.) elm treads. The single rim of the wheel is in eight pieces of timber held in place by four spokes. The main spokes each carry two subsidiary spokes so that the rim is divided into twelve equal segments (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> There is a single clamping brake at the wellhead end of the shaft.<sup>5</sup> The wheel was turned by a man to lower the bucket into the shaft. This was aided by gripping an iron handhold on the wall for stability.<sup>6</sup> One account suggests that the wheel was sometimes driven by a woman walking inside it.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 1 The treadmill well house.

<sup>1</sup> Surrey History Centre, 602, box 19.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.W. Stirling ed., *Reminiscences of an Old Sportsman, Stephen Terry of Dummer*. (London, Unicorn Press, 1934).

<sup>3</sup> HRO, 149A10/B17/1.

<sup>4</sup> Mills Archive, JKMC/DRW/23/011.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kenneth Major, *Animal Powered Engines*, (1978), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Hugo Brunner & J. Kenneth Major, *Water Raising by Animal Power*, (1972), 130-1.

<sup>7</sup> A.M.W. Stirling ed., *Reminiscences of an Old Sportsman, Stephen Terry of Dummer*. (London, Unicorn Press, 1934).

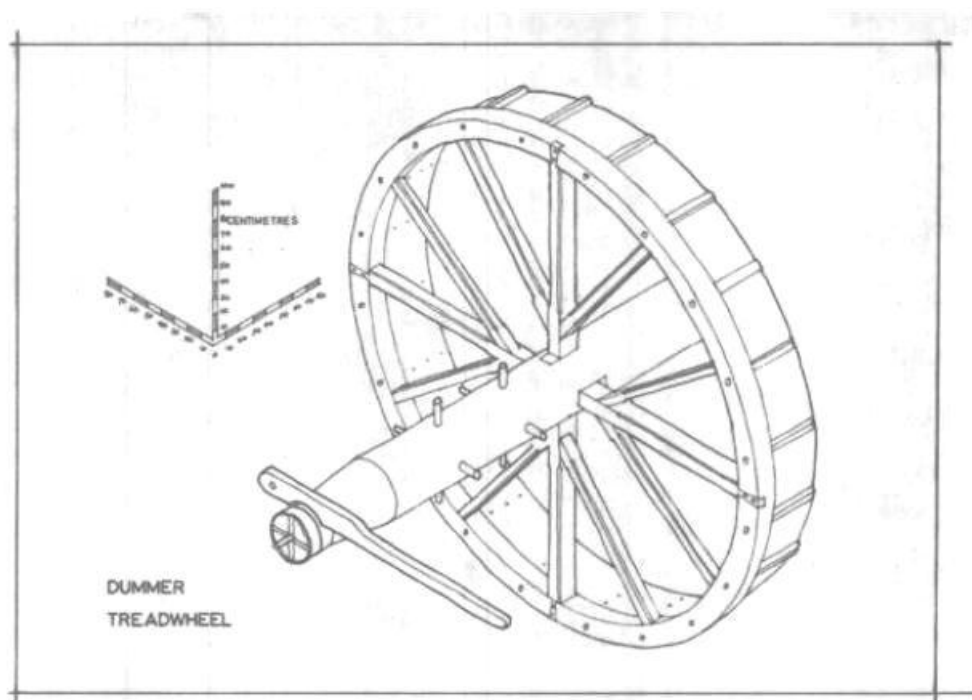


Fig. 2 Dummer treadwheel.

The wheel was fully restored by Messrs Fairhead of Alresford in 1971 with grants from Basingstoke Rural District Council and Hampshire County Council.<sup>8</sup>

There are reports of accidents at the well, the most notorious in 1887 when Alfred Bowman, a four year old boy, tripped and fell down the shaft but managed to hold on to the rope until he hit the water, but when the bucket was drawn up there was no sign of the child. Local labourer, George Eales, climbed down the well and tried to ascend carrying the boy but was too exhausted. He managed to tie a rope around the child who was hauled up.<sup>9</sup> The rope was thrown down again to retrieve Mr Eales. He was awarded the Royal Humane Society silver medal for his courage<sup>10</sup> and a presentation ceremony was held in the school room.<sup>11</sup>

The rector's wife recalled the event in a letter to her son that she:

'...had hot blankets ready and Hugh Allen and I were two hours trying to restore his breathing, and at last we were rewarded. Thanks will be given in church this morning. You never saw such a state as the village was in, men and women flying about. Papa, and Tupper with Mayfly, had gone to Herriard, so I had to take a good deal of responsibility. Stevens went for the doctor. Page and Hugh Allen got the new rope from our well. Only think if it had been one of our children.'<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> HRO, 65M72/PZ3.

<sup>9</sup> Royal Humane Society, case 23,831.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Humane Society, case 23,831.

<sup>11</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle* 18 Feb. 1888.

<sup>12</sup> HRO, 65M72/PZ3.

Another undated report was from the occupant of the cottage next to the well who recalled her grandmother saving the life of another small boy who fell down the well. She managed to stop the wheel thus preventing the boy from being crushed by the bucket. The child survived to 87 and still lived in the village in 1971.<sup>13</sup> Wells unfortunately provide a means of suicide; in 1761 Richard Geary a blacksmith lowered himself into a well with rope round his middle and neck.<sup>14</sup>

In 1896 Sir Richard Rycroft, chairman of the parish council and lord of the manor put forward a scheme to collect rainwater from the church roof and store it in an underground tank. He suggested that this should be used solely for villagers' washing purposes and for watering cattle. In times of drought farmers sometimes had to send for water five miles away. Unfortunately the scheme did not progress as the parish council put the onus of cost and construction on the district council who refused responsibility as the drinking water supply to the village was adequate and they had no obligation to supply water for washing.<sup>15</sup>

Sir Richard was not to be defeated. In 1898 he created a system in the grounds of his home, Dummer House, to supply water to the whole estate, which at the time essentially meant the whole village. He created reservoirs consisting of two large tanks holding 3,000 gallons filled by existing deep well pumps, driven by an oil engine (Fig. 3). Pipes ran from here throughout the estate to tanks in the fields for cattle which automatically filled via a ball cock and to standpipes in the village. These were operated by holding up an iron ball to create the flow of water and closed by dropping the ball thus minimising wastage. He also provided a pumped system to Kempshott House which stood at some elevation outside the village. The work was carried out by H. Smith of Basingstoke. Nine months after its inauguration the system was declared a great success.<sup>16</sup>

In 1926 the Dummer and Kempshott estate of 2,146 a. was put up for sale in 102 lots. The Dummer House water system appears to have been improved as two cement covered reservoirs near Clump Farm Homestead are described having a capacity of 25,000 gallons. Being at c.600ft. (183 m.) above sea level, the water gravitated throughout the estate to roadside taps. The house and Clump Farm were put up for sale with the exclusion of the wells, springs and pump to permit access for maintenance. Individual cottages were sold inclusive of the existing water charges due to the estate, generally ranging from 10s. to £1 per annum. Most cottages appear to have had pail closets. Some building plots were sold with the right to have a water supply laid on.<sup>17</sup>

Sir Richard's innovations probably gave the villagers a much healthier life compared with the contaminated wells and water system in Basingstoke where an outbreak of pustular tonsillitis was blamed on dirty water in 1894<sup>18</sup> and a typhoid epidemic in 1905.<sup>19</sup> A newspaper article dated 1898 reported that no deaths had occurred in

---

<sup>13</sup> HRO, 65M72/PZ3.

<sup>14</sup> *Public Ledger*, 31 Dec. 1761.

<sup>15</sup> *Hants. & Berks. Gazette*, 9 May 1896.

<sup>16</sup> *Hampshire Chronicle*, 9 Sept. 1899.

<sup>17</sup> HRO, 149A10/B17/1.

<sup>18</sup> HRO, 148M71/1/5/32/15.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Clarke, *The Great Basingstoke Typhoid Epidemic* (Basingstoke Histories), 2017.

Dummer during a six week period from 3 October which was a 'remarkable fact' especially considering the time of year when deaths were generally higher than usual.<sup>20</sup> Clean water must have been a contributory factor.

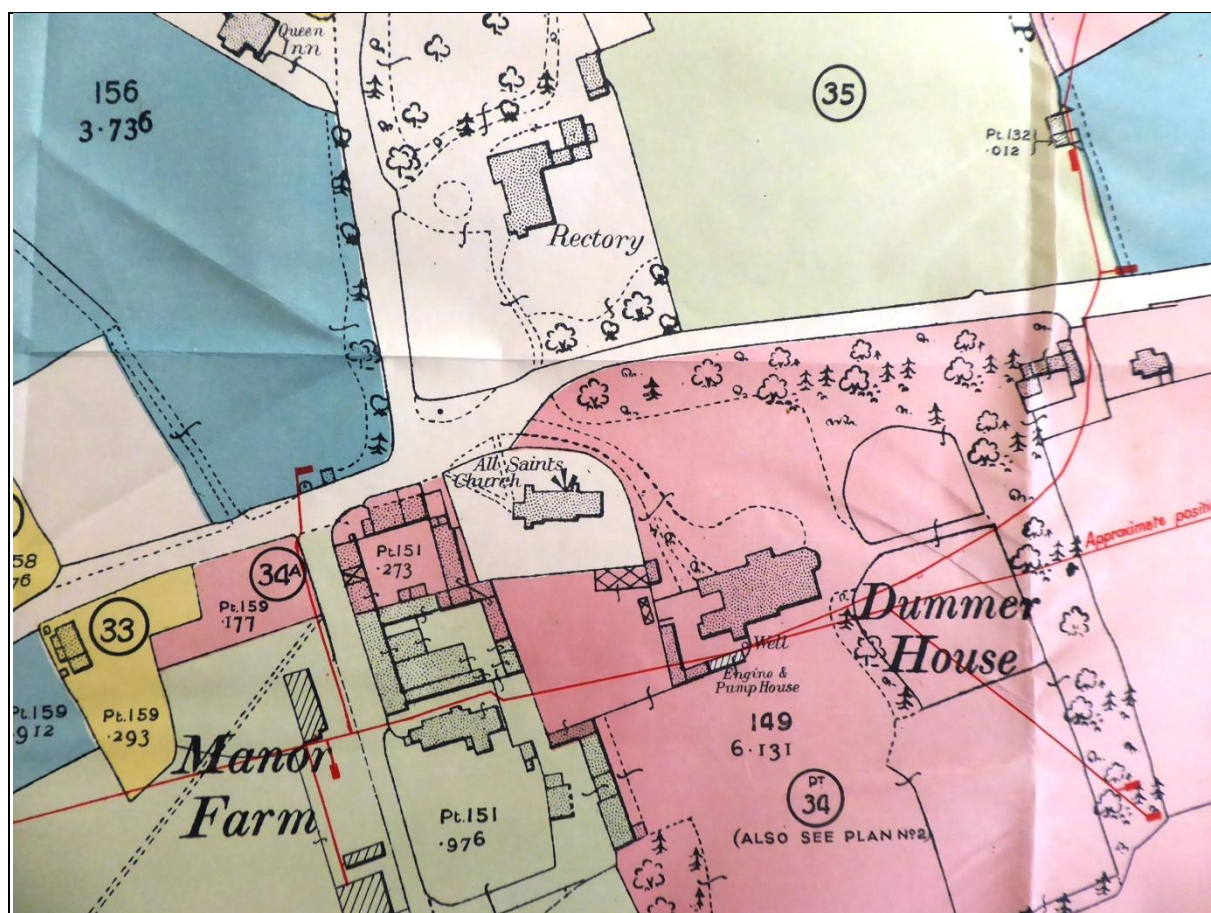


Fig. 3. Dummer House well, engine and pump house and indication of water pipelines.

By 1932 the rectory, built in 1852, had its own underground 9,000 gallon tank in addition to two wells in the garden. The tank was filled by rainwater from the roof. A pump in the scullery lifted the water back up to an internal tank in the roof. The rectory was connected to the Dummer Water Undertaking in 1937 but quite what this was is unknown as in 1949 the Women's Institute reported that there was still no mains water but that the supply was sufficient provided that the taps did not freeze in winter.<sup>21</sup> The Mid Wessex Water Company took over the water supply in 1952. The well in Up Street was closed, possibly when the new village hall was constructed c.1975. The renovated wellhead was moved to Glebe Close at the entrance of the village.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Hants. & Berks. Gazette*, 19 Nov. 1898.

<sup>21</sup> HRO, 96M96/23/3.

<sup>22</sup> Pers. Comm.