

Crookes History Booklets

These short explorations of local history topics were compiled by Constance Hallwright

Also known as 'The Bustle Lady'

Crookes, Sheffield, February 2018

Reservoirs in Crookes

In the 1700s water for much of the township of Sheffield was from reservoirs on Crookesmoor, conveyed in wooden pipes (later replaced by iron pipes) to a central cistern in town (on Division Street). From there, it was transferred to casks fixed on wheel-barrows each holding about 50 gallons, which were taken about the town by men who gained a livelihood selling water. A pailfull of water cost a penny. People resented buying water from the water carriers, and this method could not keep up with demand. In 1828 a rival company was formed by a group of speculators from London who started a rival scheme, proposing to obtain water from numerous springs to the west and north-west of the town, even from as far as Dore. The existing company unsurprisingly didn't think much of this idea, and applied to parliament for an Act of Incorporation, authorising them to construct works on a grand scale. They thus defeated "the designs of the new adventurers, who retired from the field". And in 1830, a large service reservoir at Crookes was authorised, with a conduit from Redmires to Crookes, and the construction at Redmires of two reservoirs, impounding the upper part of the Wyming Brook. However, the company had got its sums wrong, and they were only able to build one of the reservoirs at Redmires, at a cost of £100,000. In the year 1831 the population of Sheffield was 91,702 but by far the larger part of the people were supplied by wells and other private sources

Immediately after passing the Act in 1830, the company constructed the present Hadfield Service Reservoir at Crookes at a height of more than 600 feet above sea level and having an area of 5 ½ acres and a storage capacity of 21,000,000 gallons.

The Water Authority proposed to buy up the Riparian Rights of the mill owners on the Rivelin and Loxley Rivers and use the whole of the water from these sources to fill up the Strines and Dyke reservoirs in order to pump a supply of clean water into Sheffield. They suggested that the mills could be converted to run much more efficiently by steam, (generated from coal) and conceded that it would mean the streams would effectively run dry during the summer months. But understandably the mill-owners were not too impressed by this. One unfortunate effect of doing this, if it had gone ahead, would be that there would be no means of disposing of sewage, as, at that time, sewage was dumped directly into rivers (untreated) so people living on the west side of town would have 3 months' worth of sewage hanging around, during the hottest months of the year! Indeed, public hygiene inspectors observed that the course of the river Don around Lady's Bridge on a Sunday afternoon in summer consisted of a series of cesspools, because the mills upstream

impounded the water in their ponds ready for the next day's work and no 'compensation water' was running down the stream to wash the effluent away or dilute it. Don't forget, the 1860's was the time when cholera broke out in Sheffield.

Prior to 1830s very few places had piped water, and the supply was erratic and limited. Water may have been available for maybe three days a week, or for six hours a day only. So when it was available, householders had to fill a cistern or tank, and draw from this until the supply came back on again. They also had to pay a quite considerable charge to be supplied in this way, which they greatly resented. The pipes leaked underground, but no-one knew exactly how much was leaked, as it just soaked away into the groundwater, they estimated that up to 2/3 of the water was wasted.

The area from Crookes down to Crookesmoor was ideal for collecting a water supply to feed into Sheffield, as it was unpolluted, the water was clean, having just passed over the Pennines, and there was no heavy industry on this side of town to contaminate it. Another factor was the presence of a seam of Ganister rock below the sandstone of Crookes. Ganister is impervious to water, so forms a 'container' for the rainwater that falls on Crookes. This is where the spring comes from – it's rainwater that cannot filter down any lower, so it sits in underground 'puddles' which are fairly easy to get at by sinking a well, it bubbles up to the surface, if there is a fold in the rock seam. In addition, the height of Crookes, being above that of Sheffield, meant that water would flow downhill; Sheffield residents would get all the water that fell on Crookes, and Crookes would get never a drop for itself. So Crookes was a desirable area to collect drinking water for Sheffield.

Eventually, there were seven reservoirs in the Crookes area: the first was the Old Great Dam at Crookesmoor, built in 1742, which survives as the boating lake in Crookes Valley Park, and contained 8,000,000 cubic feet of water. However, each time a new dam was built, the demand for water rose, meaning additional dams were needed. So followed in turn the New Dam, Godfrey Dam, Butchers Dam, Pigsaw Dam, Ralph Dam, and Misfortune Dam, most of which do not survive. Pigsaw Dam, opened in 1855, still exists, with an entrance off School Road. In 1893 it was covered over and made into a recreation ground for the water board, being renamed Hadfield Dam –it now has a housing estate built on it, and a small part has retained its recreational function, as there is a fitness Gym, a football pitch and runs Boot Camp fitness on the grassed area.