
Water - the village pumps and springs

Water for everyone had to be fetched from the pump, of which there were two, made of cast iron in Ashendon itself. You might have to prime them by pouring a small quantity down through the cap at the top of the pump before any water would emerge, and I doubt that this was very hygienic, but no one appeared to have any ill effects as a result. Many and varied were the containers used for this water fetching, most people having a favourite system. This could well be two buckets on a yoke, with crosses of wood floating on top (this device was to prevent spillage), or perhaps no yoke, much depended on the distance you had to carry the load. It is surprising how far you can stretch a bucket of water when you have had to carry it a quarter of a mile or so. This water for internal use was kept in large earthenware pans covered with a cloth, and it remained remarkably cool even during the hot weather. These pans would have a second use at the time of wine making when they would be filled with parsnips or whatever was to be turned into a splendid brew.

Sometimes during the summer the pump would fail to draw any water up, so then a trip to the spring was called for, this not only meant further to go, but also you then had to join the queue and wait for the slow trickle of the spring to fill the bucket. I seem to remember that Pollicot had the same problems but I have no idea where their spring was.

The main spring incidentally rose from a point in the churchyard, I understand that this is a feature of many villages, as was the yew tree. Pollicot pump I seem to remember had a wooden- casing end a lead spout, but it could have been anything under the casing.

A time when much water was required was at planting time. It usually meant that plants such as cabbages would only be watered once. This I believe is still the case for most gardeners, even though water is more easily obtained nowadays. There were many different ways of planting, some people would leave their plants laid on the ground for several days to go yellow before the actual planting, others would literally screw the tops off leaving the poor plants looking like a bundle of sticks.

Of course there were many wells around the area, and dire warnings were given regarding the dangers of playing close to them. Some had only wooden lids which could be easily opened, but I think we all had a healthy respect for them. Water was drawn from them with a bucket hung on "bull pole", presumably the name comes from the pole that is used to handle unfriendly bulls, these, the poles that is, having a spring clip that attaches to the ring in the nose of said animal.

The bulls in actual fact were mostly controlled by the simple act of putting a "rickpeg" through the ring, and lifting its head parallel to the ground thereby making it difficult for it to see where it was going. Simple means first getting your bull to co-operate by allowing you to do the necessary with the peg. A "rickpeg", is a stick two feet or so long, usually made from willow and used to peg down the thatch on ricks, and sometimes used by us as wickets to ease that shortage of cricket gear.