

Somerville Road's 19th Century Stench Pipe

Sewage Disposal in Victorian Sutton Coldfield



Photo 1 – The stench pipe in Somerville Road at O.S. G.R. SP1142 9530 looking northwards towards Monmouth Drive-Digby Road, Wyndley and Park Road.
(Photo by author – 25.08.2019)

Roy Billingham

I cannot remember who first drew my attention to the existence of a stench pipe in Somerville Road, but I know that it was many years ago. I have lived for over fifty years within a few hundred yards of this splendid Victorian piece of street furniture and countless times noted it, promising myself that the next time I passed by it I would try to remember to take a photograph before the pipe was removed and lost, never to be recorded for posterity. Like all good intentions, this simple task was put off; I never remembered to have my camera with me on those frequent occasions. However, on a lovely day in late August 2019 I took the momentous step of carrying out my long-held intention and took some photographs of the stench pipe for the record. I now bring to your attention a description of the pipe, the history of the introduction of stench pipes in the mid-Victorian period and a brief history of the development of our local sewage system.

What, you may be asking yourself, is a stench pipe or stink pipe. Firstly, it is a pressure relief valve used to prevent a build-up of gas pressure in the sewers. Secondly, it ensures that any gas is vented off at a height well above that of the human nose. As sewer gases can be heavier than air, it was necessary for the wind to disperse them before they could accumulate at ground level and create an offensive atmosphere. Today, such pipes have been replaced by soil vent pipes.



Photo 2 – Details of the vent end of the stench pipe.

These pipes were simply massive hollow iron structures that disposed of the lethal and highly inflammable concoctions of methane, hydrogen sulphide and ammonia gases that built up in the sewage pipes under the roads and pavements. The main constituent gas in a sewer system is hydrogen sulphide which accounts for the smell of rotten eggs. It usually occurs when sewage is being pumped long distances or in flat areas where the speed of flow is slower. Stench pipes were usually painted green but, sadly, this one has not received a coat of paint in many years having long ago succumbed to the ravages of the elements.

The example in Somerville Road shows the lengths to which the Victorians attempted to make their street furniture as attractive as possible (Photo 1). It has a frustrum-shaped cast iron base onto which three sections of cast-iron piping have been added. Note at the top of the main section of pipe (Photo 2), the collar with its elaborate acanthus enrichments around the periphery, which provides a bedrock for the final top section of pipe. At the very top of this is a mitre-shaped metal fretwork which appears to me might once have held a glass lantern within which the gases could be burnt off. Also, on the collar is what looks like a lever system which might have enabled the flame at the top of the pipe to be controlled. This pipe was built to last and is probably around one hundred and forty years old. Somerville Road was a private development by the Somerville Estate so they possibly chose and purchased what they considered was the most attractive design for their high-quality housing development.

The stench pipe is located at the highest point in the road at a height of approximately 500ft(139m) ASL and is diagonally opposite to the entrance to Ashdene Close. The stretch of Somerville Road from Braemar Road to almost Wyndley Lane runs approximately due north so the view in Photo 1 overlooks Sutton Park (Wyndley) and Manor Hill towards the Four Oaks Estate. Somerville Road lies on the western edge of the Bromsgrove Ridge of sandstone that extends from Bromsgrove through the Birmingham city centre to Four Oaks.

It is likely that the stench pipe in Somerville Road was the only one to be installed in the Borough in Victorian times. Its location at the highest point to the south of the town might have been sufficient to vent the sewer system in the lower lying and more heavily populated area of the town centre and eradicate the problem of smells pervading the air.

There is another example of a stench pipe in the Borough, this one is in Sutton Park (Photo 3) immediately south of Holly Hurst and close to the Boldmere Gate entrance to the Park. This is a miserable relic with its top section missing and the remains leaning in a seemingly drunken position. The pipe, I think, is a much later example, possibly associated with the First World War military camp which was located in an area between the Main Gate and Wyndley Gate. During the 1914-18 war, a large military parade ground was built at Wyndley on the site of the former cycle track adjacent to the Crystal Palace and promenade gardens.

There is also a possibility that this pipe could be associated with the National Fire Service camp, later to be a Civil Defence camp, during and after the Second World War, which was built in the Park on a triangular piece of ground bounded by the road from Boldmere Gate to Streetly Gate and the adjoining road by the Powell's Pool car park to the former Holly Hurst Cottage and Wyndley splash. The camp site was in close proximity to this stench pipe.



Photo 3 – Stench pipe near Holly Hurst in Sutton Park at O.S. G.R. SP 1073 9572 possibly dating from the First World War. Compare the base of this pipe with that shown in Photo 4.

Within minutes of this article going on to our website, I received a communication from Dr. Mike Hodder expressing his interest in the installation date of the stench pipe near Holly Hurst. He advised me that up to c.2000 a stench pipe had once stood opposite the outdoor swimming baths at Keeper's Pool at the end of the track over the dam and near the entrance to the adjacent quarry. He later provided a print of a photograph of this pipe (photo 4, page 5) which was taken in 1995. The design of the base of this pipe appears identical to that of the stench pipe near Holly Hurst (photo 3, page 4). Mike believes that the pipe was removed when the lido structures were removed following damage by arson. The pipe now lies in Keeper's Pool alongside the dam.

There were for many years a block of redundant toilets at the rear of the dam at Keeper's Pool so the stench pipe could have been associated with these toilets. They were removed at about the same time that the adjacent car park was replaced by the construction of three wildlife ponds, an idea of Stefan Bodnar, I believe, but one that was not entirely successful because the clay that was employed to line the ponds was not the correct sort.



Photo 4 – Stench pipe at the north end of Keeper’s Pool dam, next to the quarry and opposite the old outdoor swimming baths, at O.S. G.R. SP 1073 9656.

(Photo by Jane Willets - Birmingham City Council)

The introduction of the stench pipe in Victoria’s Britain

Stench or stink pipes were first introduced in London after the passing of the 1858 Act in an endeavour to overcome the “Great Stink” that pervaded the capital by centralising the control of human waste. The “Great Stink” was an event occurring in central London in July and August 1858 during which time extremely hot and dry weather together with a drop in the water level of the River Thames exacerbated the smell of raw human waste and industrial effluent that was present on the banks of the river. At the time, the social scientist and journalist, George Godwin, wrote that “in parts the deposit is more than six feet deep.” The problem had been festering for some years, because of an ageing and inadequate sewer system that either emptied directly or overflowed into the Thames. Charles Dickens wrote that the Thames was “a deadly sewer...in the place of a fine, fresh river.” By June 1858 life had become so bad in London that Parliament felt that it could no longer carry out its business in Westminster and so relocated to Oxfordshire until such time that something was done about the ‘Stink’. In this same month Disraeli tabled the Metropolis Local Management Amendment Bill, a proposed amendment to the 1855 Act, which was debated in late July 1858 and passed into law on August 2, 1858. The outcome was a massive civil engineering operation to replace London’s sewer system which began in 1859 and

lasted until 1875. Joseph Bazalgette and Sir Goldsworthy Gurney were brought in to build the new sewer system and it was Gurney who was responsible for the introduction of stench pipes. As a result, most of the manufacturers of stench pipes were London based. The examples in Somerville Road and Sutton Park have no manufacturers plate on the bottom to indicate where they were made.

The need to build more houses within Sutton Coldfield

Sir Edmund C. Hartopp, owner of Four Oaks Hall, had sought in 1826 to enlarge the 1756 Luttrell encroachment by taking out of Sutton Park an additional sixty-three adjoining acres. He was prevented from doing so by an injunction from the Court of Chancery which upheld the tenets of the Royal Town's Charter. However, he was permitted to enter into an exchange of land, known as the Hartopp Exchange of 1827, with the Warden and Society by which he gave them just over ninety-three acres of land on the Powell's Pool, Meadow Platt and Tudor Hill side of Sutton Park in return for fifty-seven acres of Ladywood out of the Park to add to his Four Oaks estate, plus a strip of six acres near the upper end of the present Hartopp Road. The Court imposed a condition that not all of the ninety-three acres should be added to the Park but that some, represented by the forty-two acres on Tudor Hill, should be kept by the Corporation and let on leases to benefit the Sutton Charities.

The main advantage to the inhabitants of Sutton Coldfield was that Sir Edmund Hartopp agreed to construct Park Road from the northern end of the dam (The Parade) to the Park to provide a new entrance giving easy-access for horse-drawn carriages which had found the approach to the old entrance in Wyndley Lane (Wyndley Gate) very steep and narrow and almost impossible to negotiate. The original intention was that Sir Edmund's Park Road would be continued in a straight line within the new boundaries of the Park to cross the Meadow Platt to the old road near the foot of Holly Knoll thus avoiding building a bridge to cross the Ebrook. Failure by the Council to negotiate a land swap with Mr. John Scott, the owner of the Blade Mill, resulted in the direction of the road on entering the Park veering to the left.¹

Park Road and the new Park entrance were completed in 1829 by Mr. Valentine, the contractor. Soon after, a lodge was built for the gate keeper, just outside the Park boundary in Park Road directly opposite Tudor Hill. It had prominent chimney stacks, a surrounding verandah and a vaulted cellar, and to the rear was a pear-shaped garden that extended to the boundaries of the houses in Clifton Road. The front entrance of this gate-keeper's lodge can be seen on the left-hand side of photo 5 on page 7. There are numerous photographs of the Main Gate entrance to the Park, most of them taken from the southern side of Park Road, but this is the only one known to the author that was taken from the northern side and thus it gives a better than usual view of the front of the gate lodge. It would appear that nobody thought to photograph the lodge for the record after it was first built.

¹ Article "Exploring the Park in Search of its History" by Evans, N., contained in "Scenes from Sutton's Past", Ed. Lea, R., (1995 Ed.), Sutton Coldfield, The Westwood Press, pp. 41-53.



Photo 5 – The 1829 Main Gate Park Road entrance to Sutton Park with the Keeper’s Lodge on the left-hand side.

The photo dates from post 1891 when the original lodge was extended on the near-side to provide suitable family accommodation as well as an office for the new Park Forester and the original surrounding wooden verandah to the lodge removed. The lodge had a small vaulted cellar with barely enough headroom to move and a substantial pear-shaped rear garden. Note how the road inside the gates bears to the left (see text on page 6).

(Photo: Courtesy of Sutton Coldfield Reference Library)

In order to meet the ever-increasing demand for housing in Sutton Coldfield in the second half of the 19th century, the Warden and Society began a programme of road construction work which included the cutting of Anchorage Road and Clifton Road as far as Wyndley Lane, which it is claimed is the oldest road in Sutton Coldfield. It connects with The Driffold which is where cattle were driven from the Park to be branded. Prior to 1827, Wyndley Lane was the main horse-carriage entrance into Sutton Park but the incline both to and from Wyndley Gate to The Driffold was both very steep and narrow and proved troublesome to horse-drawn vehicles.

The Hartopp Exchanges of 1827 provided the solution to this problem. As part of this agreement, Sir Edmund C. Hartopp of Four Oaks Hall, agreed to construct Park Road and a new main entrance to the Park, thus giving easy access for horse-drawn vehicles.

Prior to the opening of Sutton Coldfield railway station in 1864, development in the town was along the old Chester Road. At Boldmere in April 1860, land comprising sixteen building plots came on to the market. By June 1863 twenty acres of freehold building land at the junction of Chester and Boldmere Roads was offered at auction. With the coming in 1864 of the London & North Western Railway’s Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield line, Sutton expanded to meet the

needs of prosperous Birmingham people who sought homes in the Borough. Doe Bank and the Anchorage Estates were carved up to provide generous house plots. By July 1870, the newly cut Anchorage Road was developed into twenty-five lots and soon after Clifton Road and Manor Road were constructed as far as Wyndley Lane. A little time later Somerville Road was built from Wyndley Lane to Jockey Road, probably by the Somerville Estate, which owned extensive land from the town centre towards New Oscott and Jockey Road.

The 1881 Ordnance Survey map shows that there was sparse housing in Clifton Road and Somerville Road but the 1913 edition of the map shows some development on both sides of Clifton Road from Park Road up to the Ebrook, as well as some more development on the Park side of Clifton Road, either side of Wyndley Lane. By 1913, Somerville Road on the east side was almost totally developed from Digby Road to Jockey Road. Digby Road was developed on its south side up to the Driffold, which, itself, was fairly well developed, particularly on its west side.

It was here that the architects, Crouch and Butler, had been designing and building Arts and Crafts houses in Digby Road and the Driffold from 1879 onwards². These comprised³:

- ‘Melbeck’, 11-13 The Driffold (1879), for Mr. Buckler
- ‘Trevose’, 7-9 The Driffold (1890), for Mr. E.W. Brampton (demolished 1967)
- ‘Newlyn’, 5 The Driffold (1892), for Mr. E.W. Brampton (demolished 1967)
- ‘Melbreck’, 11 The Driffold (1898), for Mr. Buckler
- ‘Seven Gables’, 14 Digby Road (1898), for Joseph Crouch
- ‘Top o’ the Hill’, 14 The Driffold (1899), for Edmund Butler
- ‘Wyndhurst’, 12 The Driffold (1900)

It was the intensity of new house building that overwhelmed the sewer system in Sutton Coldfield, particularly in the town centre where the density of new houses was at its greatest.

The hamlet of Maney on the Main Street (Photo 5) had from c.1850 been the area of choice for men of means to settle with their families in Sutton Coldfield (Photo 5). Around 1890 it was the building plots in the new roads like The Driffold, Digby Road, Somerville Road as more farmland was sold for building development, and later the Four Oaks Park Estate that became the new desirable places to live as can be ascertained by the number of Arts and Crafts houses built in these locations between the 1890s and the 1920s.

However, all was not sweetness in Sutton Coldfield in the later part of the 19th century as can be ascertained from the following accounts gleaned from the local press. The increase in the population of Sutton Coldfield brought with it problems associated with household waste and how to safely dispose of it. The old Warden and Society that governed Sutton Coldfield up to 1886 were tardy in facing up to these problems and drew widespread criticism.

² **Crouch & Butler** – Joseph Crouch (1859-1936) set up his own architectural practice in 1884 at 34 Newhall Street, Birmingham, and was joined in 1886 by his business partner Edmund Butler (1862-1936), who had married Crouch’s sister. Crouch built ‘Seven Gables’ for himself in 1898 at 14 Driffold, Sutton Coldfield.

³ “Crouch and Butler” by Herbert, R., and Shackley, B., contained in *“Birmingham’s Victorian and Edwardian Architects”*, Ballard, P., (Ed.), (2009), Part IV: The Arts & Crafts Movement, No. 20, - Oblong Creative Ltd., Wetherby, for The Victorian Society, pp. 474-476.



Photo 6 – Maney Corner in 1872

“Smelly Sutton”

Marian Frankling in her account *“The Story of Sutton Parade”*⁴ states that although house building had developed extensively by the end of the 1880s, footpaths and adequate sanitation had not kept pace with the development. In 1878 at the very start of the development [the Parade], a letter to the *Sutton News* from a Birmingham visitor complained of filthy smells within 200 yards of the Town Hall in Mill Street (the present day Masonic Hall) and compares the invigorating air of the Park with the unhealthy state of the town. This letter bears a striking resemblance in content to one thirteen years later that is quoted below. Could it be the same writer having a long-standing bee in his bonnet about Sutton’s governance.

In January 1882 a letter in *The Sutton Coldfield News* complained generally of the poor state of roads and footpath claiming that there was hardly a street in Sutton that is in a creditable state, the footpaths for the most part are laid with those old-fashioned “petrified kidneys”, otherwise known as cobble stones, upon which it was almost impossible to walk. The writer went on to claim that it was preferable to wade through the deep mud in the horse road than walk on the cobble stones.

Even at the time of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887 the Parade came in for criticism. This time it was said to be one of the most unsightly streets of the Borough mainly because of the amount of litter that was deposited on the wasteland opposite one of the shops.

⁴ Frankling, M.M., *“The Story of Sutton Parade”*, (1981), Privately published, pp. 12-14, Sutton Coldfield Ref. Library. QSH 97 SUT. A transcription (April 2020) by Don McCollam, for which the author is indebted, is now on this website.

In the following year, 1888, *The Sutton and Erdington Times* drew attention to the inconvenience experienced by tradespeople and the general public because there was no properly defined footpath along the Parade although the Borough Council had plans to kerb,



Photo 7 – This shows The Parade in c. 1890 with the line of lime trees between Upper and Lower Parade. (Photo courtesy of Sutton Coldfield Reference Library)

channel and pave many of the town's streets including the Parade. The line of lime trees that divide the upper and lower Parades were planted at about this time. By Easter 1888, it was noted that the Parade had been greatly improved but it was clear that these improvements did

nothing to improve the standard of sanitation. On September 8, 1888, twenty-two rate payers on the right-hand side of the Parade got together to complain about the state of the footpath in front of their shops and the lack of WCs. They insisted that WCs should first be installed in their properties and then the asphalt pavement laid, thereby getting rid of the need to break up the pavement again in order to lay sewer pipes. In June 1889 there were still complaints that *"in the most populous part of the town quite twenty houses are not connected to the main sewer."* In September 1889, the lower Parade past *The Dog* inn was left unfinished because a system of drainage was required. The new Borough Council, installed in November 1886, was obviously having immense problems tackling this sensitive issue of smelly sanitation and bringing Sutton Coldfield up to the required standards of that time.

Although in his Annual Report for 1889, the Borough's Medical Officer, Dr. A. Bostock Hill, reported to the Town Council that his conclusion was that the general health of the town's population was fine with nothing adverse to report, there were other public comments that might suggest otherwise.

The following letter appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Mail* in its edition of Friday, April 10, 1891.

To the Editor of the Birmingham Daily Mail

Sir, - The health of Birmingham is so dependent upon that of the open spaces in its neighbourhood that the present epidemic at Sutton Coldfield has a personal interest to the inhabitants of our own city. As a frequent visitor to the Park my senses have often been offended in Sutton roads by a stench more obnoxious than any I have

experienced in Birmingham. It proceeds from the manholes of the sewers. From enquiries, I find that the fall of the sewers is not sufficient to keep the sewage moving, and that it lies festering in the pipes, poisoning the blood of all who come within its range. To palliate the evil I would suggest that, in place of the manholes, air shafts at least 10ft high be erected. These would carry the gases out of breathing reach, and considerably lessen the present danger, - Yours faithfully,

A CONSTANT VISITOR

For “air shafts at least 10ft high” read “stench pipes”. This letter seems remarkably similar to the one quoted above from 1878; could it be by the same complainant. The reference to “the present epidemic at Sutton Coldfield”, possibly I think, refers to the “Russian” flu pandemic of 1889-1893 which affected the whole country. It was a deadly influenza pandemic that killed around one million people worldwide and was first recorded in Saint Petersburg, Russia, in the autumn of 1889, where it infected a large proportion of the population. Within four months the pandemic had spread throughout the Northern Hemisphere and in Britain it persisted from about late December 1889 through to December 1890 with recurrences from March to June 1891, June 1892, the winter of 1893 to 1894 and early 1895. In the same time it had also spread to every part of the earth. This sounds familiar territory in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Tracing its path, scientists would observe that the pandemic tended to follow the major roads, rivers and, most notably, railway lines – many of which had not existed during the last major pandemic in the 1840s, and in the case of the U.S. probably it was introduced to the American east coast by means of the larger, faster steamships of the day that plied the Atlantic from Europe and elsewhere. From New York, Boston and Philadelphia, it likewise quite rapidly followed the railroads and rivers to the towns and cities on the west coast of the U.S.

The Parade area of Sutton Coldfield was not the only sewage problem area because Holly Hurst Cottage in Sutton Park, close to Wyndley Gate, also had serious sanitary problem in 1898 when the Borough Council were alerted to several cases of diphtheria in the household of Charles Townshend, the tenant. The Council immediately carried out temporary work to improve the sanitation of the premises and then proceeded with an urgent programme of extensions and alterations to put the premises into a permanently sanitary condition.⁵ Holly Hurst and Rowton Well Cottages were built in 1852 in somewhat remote regions of the Park. The other cottages within the Park were built at a later date as gate lodges and so were more conveniently located for services to be connected.

Sewage Disposal in Sutton Coldfield

There is a scarcity of archival information regarding the introduction of sewage disposal in Sutton Coldfield or even the construction of the sewage farm at Minworth, which was sometime in the 1870s. What we do know is that around 1870 Joseph Chamberlain, the Birmingham Council leader, being a disciple of George Dawson’s Civic Gospel, was guiding Birmingham towards owning its own gas supply then, when problems with water supply to Birmingham appeared, the town created its own water supply company by buying up the small private providers. This

⁵ Minute 2358, October 5, 1898, of the Park & Estates Committee of Sutton Coldfield Borough Council.

seemed to be the way that the bigger local authorities were moving in the second half of the 19th century in order to improve the essential services to their growing populations. The improvements introduced by Chamberlain were to become the blueprint for local government and were soon adopted by other towns and cities.

Sutton Coldfield avoided Birmingham's water supply problem when in 1892 the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company commissioned the Shenstone Water Pumping Station which provided Sutton Coldfield with its first tapped water supply.

Prior to sewage systems being introduced to Sutton Coldfield, most household waste found its way to an outflow, usually a stream, a river or the local pond, or it was collected by hand from the outside toilets or cesspits by night-soil men and used as manure on local fields. With the introduction of household toilets connected to a sewage system any build-up of gas in pipes worked its way back up through the household toilets. The invention and installation of the 'S-bend' toilet solved the problem of the backflow of gas build-up for the householder, but it made the gas in the sewage system worse. This necessitated the use of stench pipes.

My research into the origins of the use of stench pipes within the Borough provided no information so it was necessary to broaden it to associated causes. The old system of sewage disposal was satisfactory while the town of Sutton Coldfield was mainly rural and each house had sufficient land attached to it to absorb what Riland Bedford called "the legitimate overflow of malodorous matter".

The population growth generally experienced in the 19th century, especially where there were concentrations of new housing, brought with it serious concerns regarding health issues over the increase in sewage disposal. The first census of Sutton Coldfield took place in 1801 and recorded that the town had a total population of 2,847. By 1811 this had risen to 2,959 with 617 houses. Further increases in population were recorded in 1821 (3,426) and in 1831 (3,684). By the middle of the 19th centuries there was an increasing migration of people from the industrial areas seeking better living conditions in neighbouring countryside and, of course, this increase required people to service it and the population increase was self-perpetuating. The England Census of 1861 revealed that Sutton Coldfield's population had increased to 4,662 and by 1881 to 7,737⁶.

Riland Bedford in his *History of Sutton Coldfield*⁷ states that,

"The opening of the railway communication with Birmingham was the commencement of an era of much increase in prosperity and population of Sutton Coldfield... But with the population came problems which the place was hardly ripe to encounter... One of the first matters which cropped up after the opening of the railway was the diversion of footpaths which existed on the western side of the town. One of these entered the fields on the western side of the High Street just opposite the Tamworth-lane, where the toll bar stood, and passing the back of the Anchorage and Rookery gardens emerged again at the foot of Mill Street, having crossed at right angles another foot road which ran by the side of the Three Tuns (Inn) to Clifton Hill, and thence to the Park Gate. This latter path had to be diverted in consequence of

⁶ En.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Sutton Coldfield – accessed on 24/10/2019.

⁷ Riland Bedford, Rev^d. W.K., *History of Sutton Coldfield*, (1891), Birmingham, privately published, p.60, Chap. IX.

the erection on Clifton Hill, of a Railway Hotel: and a road running around the hotel by the station was substituted for it.”⁸

This must refer to the construction of Anchorage Road and Clifton Road after 1862. Riland Bedford goes on to refer to the growing difficulty of sewage disposal in the town, thus:

“...even in the early years of this decade [*the 1860s*] the increase in [*house*] building was bringing with it the sewage difficulty, and the want of a local authority to deal with the subject soon made itself felt. In the then existing Public Health (Nuisance Removal) Act a Council for the purposes of the Act was defined as a body presided over by a Mayor, “Warden” or other officer, the word Warden having been, it was believed, introduced at the suggestion of Mr Baron Webster⁹, expressly to meet the case of Sutton Coldfield. Beyond the presentment of nuisances occasionally made by the Court leet, the Act was a dead letter at Sutton, and as nearly every house had sufficient land attached to it to absorb the legitimate overflow of malodorous matter, while the streets were kept clean by volunteer scavengers, there was small cause for complaint. In 1866 the lessee of the meadows between the Park-road and the [E]brook refused to permit the influx of sewage from the recently erected houses in the Station-road, then known as Hacket-street¹⁰, and stopped an open ditch down which the overflow from the town generally had found its way into the brook. This matter was settled by private arrangement, contributions being obtained from the owners of property affected, with some assistance from the Corporation, but this induced a belief that the Corporation ought to avail themselves of the power given them by the Act, and this ultimately resulted in action on the part of certain inhabitants for the improvement of the local government of the place. They were much strengthened by changes which had taken place in the tenancy of some of the principal houses. Sir William Hartopp had died in 1864, and his son Sir John let Four Oaks Hall in 1869 to Mr. James Chance [*Chairman of Chance Brothers*]. Moor Hall was occupied by Mr. Sampson Samuel Lloyd [*of the banking family*] afterwards M.P. for South Warwickshire, and Maney House was tenanted by Mr. J. Motteram, Q.C., Judge of the Birmingham County Court, all these gentlemen taking an intelligent interest in the sanitary question”.

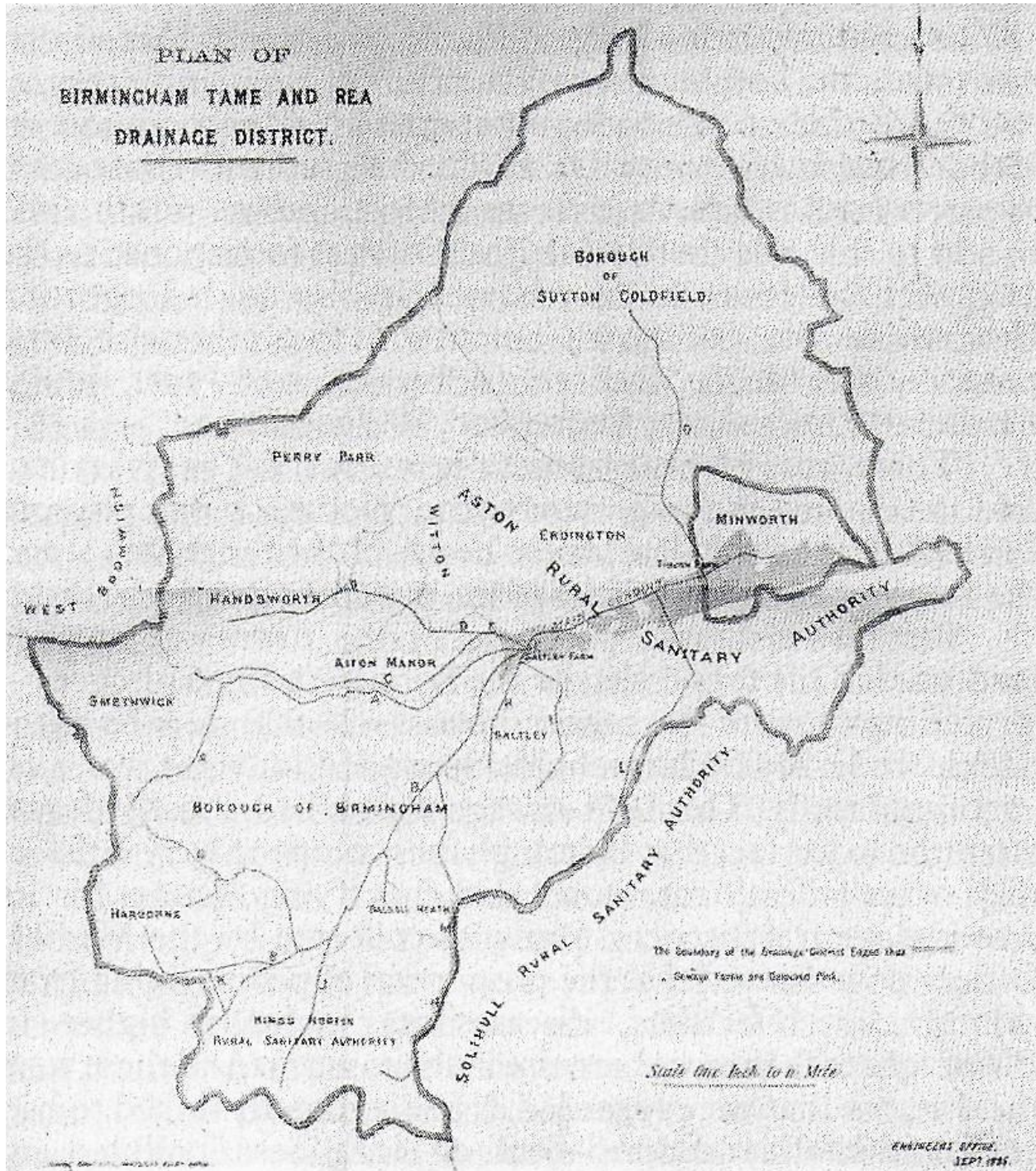
Under the 1872 Act, urban sanitary authorities were set up for Aston Manor and Saltley, districts which were now included in Birmingham, neither having previously had a local board of health. The remainder of Aston parish outside Birmingham formed Aston Rural Sanitary Authority

⁸ **Ibid:** Riland Bedford, Rev^d. W.K., p.60.

⁹ **Baron Dickinson Webster** (1818-1860), lived at Penns Hall, Sutton Coldfield and was the proprietor of Websters, the wire manufacturers, who were involved in the manufacture of the first transatlantic telegraph cable at Penns Mills. In 1855 the business of Websters merged with that of Horsfall at Hay Mills, Birmingham, and in 1859, the whole business was transferred to Hay Mills and the Penns Mills were closed. B.D. Webster was a J.P., a freemason, a member of the Aston Union and of the Turnpike Trust and was Warden of the town in 1844 and in 1855-1858.

¹⁰ **Hacket street:** In 1833, F.B. Hacket, Esq., a county magistrate and deputy-lieutenant is listed as being a member of the Sutton Coldfield Corporation.

which included Sutton Coldfield¹¹. By 1882 the Aston Rural Sanitary Authority had laid main sewers to New Hall.



Map 1 – 1886 Plan of the Birmingham Tame & Rea Drainage District, which Included Sutton Coldfield and shows the course of the Ebrook flowing from Streety towards Minworth to join the River Tame.

¹¹ Ibid: p. 93.

The Public Health Act, 1875, Section 279, provided that where it appeared that it would be to the advantage of interested local authorities to be formed into a United District for certain specified purposes, the Local Government Board (the predecessors of the Ministry of Health) might by Provisional Order form such a District. This was accordingly done in respect of a system of sewage disposal in the Birmingham area, by the formation of the Birmingham Tame and Rea District Drainage Board in 1877, and the responsibility placed upon them was, briefly, the disposal of the sewage of a United District covering at that time 34,343 acres, and with a population estimated at less than half-a-million persons. The United District covered the various outfall sewage works situated in the catchment areas of the Rivers Tame, Cole and Blythe, as shown in Map 1 on the previous page, so that (in the words of the 1877 Order) "it may be discharged into any stream, river or water-course without breach of the Rivers Pollution Act, 1876"¹².

In 1881, the Board purchased from W.W. Bagot, a local landowner, 344 acres of land in Minworth, and a further 358 acres of land in Minworth from him in 1888, the result being the creation of the Minworth Sewage Farm. The Minworth Sewage Treatment Works was commissioned in c.1900. At that time Minworth was within the administrative area of Meriden Rural District Council and was acquired by Sutton Coldfield in 1931.

Conclusions

The stench pipe in Somerville Road is an above-ground archaeological relic from a particular period in the development of Sutton's Victorian sewer system. The town obviously had problems with sewage disposal as per the archival evidence and it took some time for these to be solved. The old selective governing body, the Warden and Society, had dragged its feet on many issues and was self-serving when it came to issues where individual interests were put above those of the people they were supposed to serve. It is also a reminder of the early years of the new Municipal Borough and its difficulties in trying to meet the new Acts of Parliament and local government regulations and keep ahead of the problems that an expanding population presented. Sutton's first Medical Officer of Health, Dr. A.B. Hill, who was keen to promote Sutton Coldfield's development as a health resort, proudly declared in 1895 that there had been not a single death from smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid fever or measles and "*a sanitary condition has been obtained comparable with that of any health resort in the kingdom*".¹³ The Municipal Borough of Sutton Coldfield had come into existence in 1886 amidst problems that appear to have been overcome in the following nine years.

Roy Billingham, May 2020, Rev 1.

¹² Article "Sewage Disposal" by Greey, A.L., of Birmingham Tame & Rea District Drainage Board, contained in 'City of Birmingham Handbook for 1950', pp. 275-280.

¹³ Lillywhite, J., "*Housing Development in the Borough of Sutton Coldfield as shown in the annual reports of the Medical Officer of Health 1886-1937*", contained in Proceedings of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group, Vol.12: Sp