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# MINWORTH SEWAGE WORKS

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*Viewed from Census Records*

1891-1911

*D J Redwood*



## **A Brief History**

The sale of land owned by the Bagot family of Pype Hayes Hall in 2 tranches of approximately 350 acres each, in 1881 & 1888, in order to develop the Minworth Sewage Farm for the newly created Birmingham Tame & Rea Drainage Board was to have a major impact on the hamlet of Minworth, adjacent Minworth Greaves, the nearby village of Curdworth and other local settlements.

Undoubtedly the canal played a very significant part in the building and servicing of the new Sewage Works, giving as it did, access to an already established mode of transport that could be used, not just to bring in materials for building the farm and associated housing and buildings, but also to remove any waste materials.

The investment in a new wharf with connected railway system and crange serves to highlight how the canal played a major role bringing in the large quantities of ash from local power stations from 1918 onwards that was needed to maintain the filtration system in the bacteria beds.

## **Early Developments**

As Birmingham had expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like all major cities and towns, it needed to find ways of coping with the increasing quantities of sewage produced by its citizens. Some would have been allowed to enter the River Rea, which then flowed into the Tame before finally ending up, via the Trent, in the North Sea.

At the same time, men working at night would collect 'Night soil' from privies and cesspits. Piled into carts, it would then be transported to nearby farms to be spread out, to decompose and then be sold on as fertilizer to farmers, as well as market gardeners of whom there were several in the Minworth and Curdworth area adjacent to the canal.



**A sewage farm circa 1868**

But this system of disposal, largely unchanged over centuries, began to be increasingly incapable of coping with the numbers now living in the rapidly expanding number of courts and back-to-backs that had been thrown up in the city as industry flourished. In 1849, for example, it was noted that some 50 000 people lived in 2 000 courts without drains, cesspools or piped water. Often their wells were badly contaminated.

The River Rea could not handle the amount that was dumped into it and, by this time, such was the amount of sewage in the river that the local mill weirs became blocked causing extensive flooding in Digbeth and Deritend.

The city had to find solutions. Therefore, a system of sewer pipes that could take the waste out to rented fields in Saltley and elsewhere, including Tyburn was created. Left to dry out, the solid matter was sold as fertilizer and the remaining water would then be channeled into the river.

Unfortunately, as the century grew older this process, too, was unable to keep up with the 60 tons of solid matter that was produced daily by some 250 000 inhabitants, particularly as dealing with it was a slow process. It also required large areas of land in Salford, Tyburn, Berwood, Minworth as well as Hams Hall. 12 million gallons of untreated effluent went straight into local rivers daily, before ending up in the Tame.



**From Maps of Birmingham by John Morris Jones**

Fortunately, the far-sighted leadership of Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham, established the Birmingham Tame and Rea Drainage Board in 1877 with the money (£164 000 was loaned by the Government to pay for new works) and powers to take action to solve the problem.

Over the next 25 years the same methods used in Birmingham to treat sewage continued and were developed. Crude sewage was treated in tanks with lime added as a precipitant and then completed by using filtrate a on land (a method devised by Sir Edward Frankland).

Unfortunately, “Although it was possible to obtain a well-purified effluent by these means, an undesirably large area of land was required and, at times, an intolerable stench was produced” (*Works of the Birmingham Tame and Rea Drainage Board 1937 - H.C. Whitehead*)

Eventually this unsatisfactory method demanded an alternative.

At this time, the land owned by the Bagots and adjacent to the canal at Minworth was a large area of treeless flat terrain alongside the River Tame with Plants Brook running across it. Early work led to field hedges being removed and Plants Brook diverted to the east of the site.

The total land purchased for the sewage farm was clearly of a significant size and ideally situated on the outskirts of the city, beyond the line of the smaller existing farms that lined the Tame. Its situation alongside the river was almost perfect.

New ideas for managing sewage, however, were being developed and, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, a system of passing sewage through filtration tanks became popular.

In 1898 the Drainage Board were struggling to meet the financial costs associated with the capital outlay required to further extend the existing irrigation area. They decided to allow the expenditure of £1 000 for the construction of experimental artificial filters.

This method of percolating bacteria beds was discovered accidentally and obviated the need for the former sewage farms.

The Drainage Board agreed to employ the expertise of a Professor Dewar and a well-known and highly regarded civil engineer, Mr. Thomas Hawksley, to oversee the new installations.



**Thomas Hawksley**

Initially there were four experimental bacteria beds at the Minworth Greaves Sewage Farm (*Minworth Works booklet 1981*). Each was approximately 120' in diameter and had a mechanical distribution system. They started to operate in 1903.

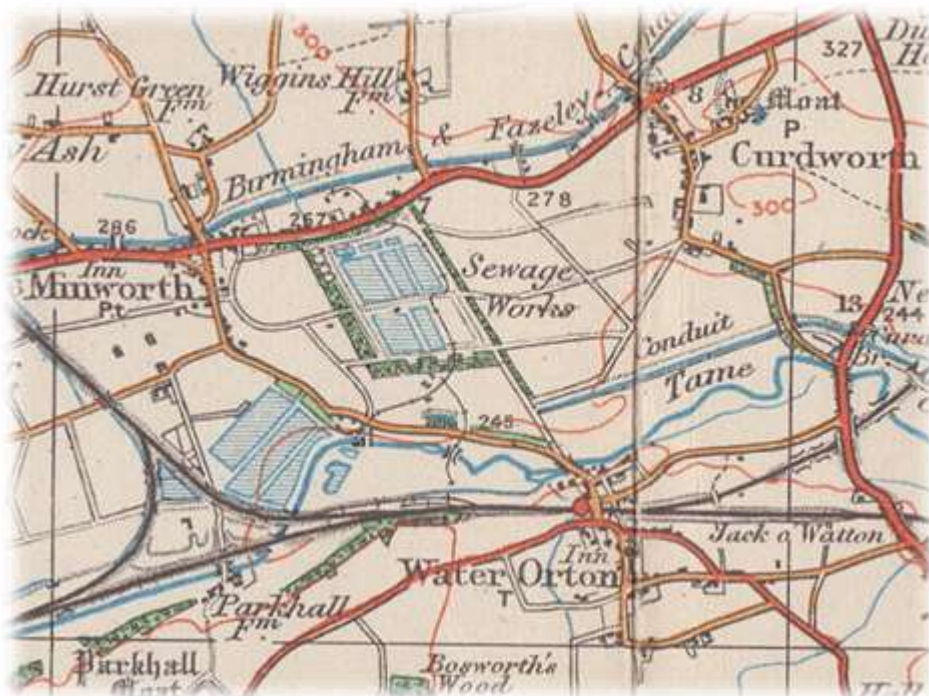
Now the solid matter could be separated as sediment. The new system needed much less land than the earlier processes and this allowed large areas of good fertile land to be sold for farming. Other former sewage farms could also be released to be used for industry and housing, as well as 744 acres leased to a W. J. Edkins "for shooting only". In total, some 2 727 acres became surplus to requirement.

By 1911 over 30 acres of bacteria beds were in use at Minworth and the treatment of sewage on the land was finally abandoned.

"The filter beds were built alongside the Kingsbury Road near Plants Brook and work continued up to the outbreak of the First World War. With the sewage workers recruited as soldiers, women, conscientious objectors and German prisoners of war completed the work." (*William Dargue 2014*)

Eventually 6 rectangular bacteria beds had been commissioned by 1921, increasing the treatment area to 42 acres. (*Minworth Works booklet 1981*)

This brief account of the establishment and development of the Minworth Sewage Farm in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries helps to place an examination of the relevant 1891, 1901 and 1911 census records in context.



## **The builders and operators**

The census records for the period covered by this paper provide a wealth of information that enables us to have a good understanding of the impact that the creation of the sewage farm or works had on the local communities at the start of the new century and then, once established, how many families relied on the Drainage Board for their employment.

*“A Cut Around Sutton Coldfield”* by the author examines the early life and people of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal between Dunton & Minworth, but it is clear that the canal and the sewage works were inextricably linked, each needing the other through the building phase and the ongoing maintenance and development of what, in time, was to become one of the largest municipal sewage works in the country before being privatized in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The early years around 1891**

Most employment in Minworth and Curdworth was agrarian at this time. Market gardening was also evident and growers would have been grateful for the relatively accessible locally produced fertilizer that was being created at Salford, Ashold & Tyburn.

Near to the canal was Plants Brook Waterworks, created over the period 1866-79. It was built on land, some 50 acres, purchased from the Wakefield Trustees, descendants from an Edward Darcy who had created the Berwood/Minworth boundary.

Reservoirs were built along with a pumping station. Living next to the Works were a number of workers employed to keep the pumps (or Stationary Engines) working. The supply of water from this source, fed by the Ebrook, was “said to be large and abundant” (*A Treatise on Waterworks for the Supply of Cities and Towns by Samuel Hughes 1882*)

Dwelling near the 2 drivers, Samuel Dingley and Samuel Elwell, and their stoker, Henry Hastings, were 2 canal toll collectors, Frank H. Fallows and William Pickering.

Railway employees (the line ran across from Water Orton where there was a major junction) who lived locally included a Station Master, signal men, a platelayer and a porter. This proximity to the proposed sewage works was to prove important in developing the site, alongside the canal.

Gradually the land purchases made from the Bagot family in the 1880s were brought into use to manage the city’s sewage.

The census mentions 5 General Labourers living in Minworth – Samuel Davey (b. 1831 in Worfold, North Elmham, Norfolk), his sons Samuel (b. 1869 in Bromsgrove) and John (b. 1872 in Minworth) along with John Harvey (b. 1851 in Ipswich) and William Eaves (b. 1861 in Minworth).

It is conceivable that they were employed in a number of ways e.g. road maintenance, at the waterworks or on the canal. However, it is also possible that they were amongst the early workers on the new sewage farm being created at Minworth. This hypothesis is strengthened by the record relating to a Francis J. Heape (b. 1866 in Curdworth) who was said to be employed as a Leveller on Sewage Farm. Where his place of employment was actually sited is open to conjecture but it could have been the new site. He is likely to have been involved in the spreading out of the sewage on fields and, perhaps, some of the General Labourers mentioned, assisted him.

His father, James (b. 1829 in Curdworth) worked as a Canal Labourer or Navvy on barges.

### **The Building Phase circa 1901**

By the time of the Census it was evident that the character of the hamlet of Minworth was changing significantly due to the construction of the Sewage Farm as well as housing for Drainage Board employees. These attractive properties are still evident in and around the village and its Green, along Kingsbury Road towards Curdworth and on the road leading over the Tame to Water Orton.

When recording the workers that were housed in and around Curdworth and Minworth, the enumerators often used an interesting symbol over or adjacent to the description of employment given to a number of workers. It appears to be O<sup>7/1</sup> or possibly O<sup>1/1</sup>. Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to explain what was the significance of this abbreviation but it does, at least, make it easier to identify many.

In 1901 a change was made to local Enumeration District boundaries. Thus a *‘formerly detached portion of Minworth .... commencing at the Kingsbury Main Road’* became part of Curdworth District 18 but the enumerator, Thomas Henry Negus, then adds a *“Note – A formerly detached portion of the Hamlet of Minworth is uninhabited.”* Confusing, but nevertheless it provides a starting point for an exploration of the Drainage Board’s construction workforce at this time.

It would be naïve to expect teams of navvies and labourers to be conveniently assigned to gangers and foreman living near to them in each Census District. Nevertheless, the distribution of those, with responsibility for managing their workers, around the cottages and dwellings where they were dispersed does show a degree of linkage. In reality, however, it is likely that the teams were brought together to reflect daily or weekly work patterns flexibly.

It does allow a complex situation to be examined in the following pages in a more manageable manner and to explore the information gleaned from the census pragmatically.

## **Curdworth Enumeration District 18**

In this District, there were some 70+ workers who can be identified as having employment relating to the Sewage Farm. The youngest was 17, the oldest 62 with most aged between 30 and 50 years of age. A good number had their family with them. These were often stated as working for Contractors and would have several navvies billeted with them. For example, George Smith, a Contractors Foreman (Drainage) and his wife, Rose had 6 navvies in their 4-roomed cottage.

Locally, 4 came from Curdworth, 1 from Erdington and 2 from Birmingham. The remainder came mostly from the Midlands and Southern England (see below) but 2 were born in Wales (Carmarthen and Monmouth) and 1 in Ireland (Kiltimagh) with 2 giving no place of birth. 1 was born in Shepherd's Bush, London.

Of the northern counties, 1 came from Yorkshire and 1 from Lancashire (Thurlsworth)

### **Other Counties – Place of Birth**

Buckinghamshire	Chartridge
Gloucestershire	2 from Bristol
Herefordshire	Goodrich and 1 other worker born in county
Leicestershire	Leicester, Swinderly, Wilsford and 2 born in county
Lincolnshire	Lincoln, Louth and South Rauceby
Middlesex	Brentford
Northamptonshire	Byfield, Duston, Harlestone, Harpole, Heyford, Marston Trussell, Weedon and 2 born in county
Shropshire	Baschurch, Ellesmere, Whitchurch
Staffordshire	Brewood, Brierley Hill, Gornall, Longton, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton.
Suffolk	Lakenheath
Surrey	East Hoathly, Windlesham
Sussex	Battle, Hardenshill
Warwickshire	Aston Cantlow, Halesowen, Hatton, Kings Heath Snitterfield, Stockingford, Witham and 1 in county
Wiltshire	Brinkworth
Worcestershire	Chaddesley Corbett, Lye, Ripple, Stourbridge.

### **Occupations**

The enumerator provides useful details that allow a comprehensive picture to be created of those who were mostly transient workers billeted in Curdworth while the sewage farm was being developed.

There were 2 Gangers – 1 was a Contractors' Navvy Ganger Drainage, the other was a Sewage Farm Ganger.



3 Foremen were mentioned – a Contractors' Foreman Drainage, a Sewage Farm Foreman and a Drainer Foreman. These positions allow us to understand some of the structure for the work force employment.

The Navy Ganger, Charles Tuffs (b. 1858 in Lakenheath, Suffolk) had at least 21 Navvies to manage, 3 of whom were living in his cottage.

The Sewage Farm Ganger, Charles Metcalf (b. 1847 in Yorkshire) and his wife, Teresa, lived in the same cottage as Thomas Moss (possibly Mors) and his family. Thomas, born in 1865, came from Snitterfield and was a Labourer on the Sewage Farm. There were 4 other workers with the same description as Thomas so it seems likely that Charles took responsibility for at least these 5 workers. They would have probably have been overseen by the Sewage Farm Foreman, Charles Green (b. 1881 in Brewood, Staffordshire).

The Contractor's Drainage Foreman was George Smith (b. 1861 in Louth, Lincolnshire. There are 7 workers described as Drainage Contractor's labourers for whom he may have taken responsibility.

The Drainer Foreman was Frank Chambers who was born in the village of Swinderby, Leicestershire in 1864. 3 men were described as Land Drainers, 5 as Drainers and 16 as Drainers' labourers. Did Frank manage all these workers?

Other occupations included the Contractor's Engine Fireman, David Arthur Tuffs (b. 1883 in Harlestone, Northamptonshire) and George Thomas Turner (the oldest worker having been born in 1839 in Windlesham, Surrey) who was a Traction Engine Driver on Sewage Farm.

Closely associated with these two might have been William Smith (b. 1852 in Chartridge, Buckinghamshire) who worked as a Ploughman on Sewage Farm.



**Steam Ploughs at Minworth Sewage Works**

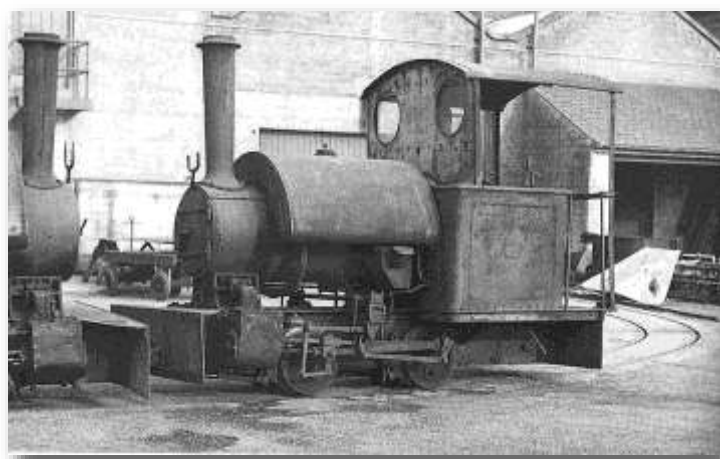
There were also 2 Bricklayers' labourers and a Lead joint plumb maker staying in the district.



**Wharf entrance to Sewage Works**

The sewage works had its own extensive 2' gauge railway system, linked to the canal and running throughout the Farm (even into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century). The following may have worked for the Drainage Board but they may also have been employed by the Midland Railway Company and based at Water Orton where there was an important junction.

There were - a driver, a shunter, a track foreman, a platelayer foreman, platelayer and labourer's platelayer as well as a goods porter described in the Census record.



**Bagnall 0-2-0 loco at Minworth Sewage Works  
1961**

## **Curdworth & Minworth Enumeration District 19**

It is very evident that the Enumerator, William Henry Wilkins, had some difficulties getting a major group of navvies to cooperate with him as he recorded their details. For some 14 men, all they would provide were their surnames, apart from 1, so the enumerator was left to guess ages and failed to record their places of birth. They were all living in a Lodging House situated at The Bull Ring, Minworth and run by William Riley who lived there with his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife and her 3 children. Even William would not say, or did not know, where he was born.

A comment was written vertically up the Record by the enumerator stating that this was "*All the information attainable – see note herewith attached*". Sadly, that note appears to have been discarded or lost over time so, whilst we may guess how William Wilkins may have felt about this situation, we will never know exactly.

Some 80 workers can be clearly identified as being employed to deliver the sewage works development in this District. In addition, there are 26 classified as General Labourers plus 6 working on a Farm that could have been the Sewage Farm, as they were not classified as Agricultural. It is conceivable that they were not employed on the Sewage Farm but, as the enumerator does make it clear where labourers are Agricultural or working on Road maintenance, it appears probable. Nearly all were classed as Boarders, too, so it does seem likely that these were employed on the new works.

The oldest was 73 and the youngest 13 years of age. There were 7 workers born before 1850 but the majority being born between 1870 and 1889 – some 59 in this age group and 38 others between 1850 and 1869. 7 failed to give their age and the 14 navvies who failed to give full information are likely to have inaccurate approximations made by Wilkins.

In addition, at the nearby Plants Brook Waterworks were 7 workers, who would have had close contact with the navvies, labourers and others working for the Drainage Board. Their ages ranged from 16 to 55 years of age.

The majority came from local areas within Warwickshire. More locally - 2 came from Sutton Coldfield, 1 from Wiggins Hill, 2 from Minworth, 3 from Curdworth, 1 from Erdington, 2 from Castle Bromwich, 1 from Tyburn and 4 from Birmingham.

One came from Sevenly – a place not yet identified, one from Scotland and one from Calcutta, India. 2 were born in Wales – Ross and Monmouth while 15 were born in Ireland, 1 of whom came from Dublin.

17 others failed to identify their place of birth.

## Other Counties – Place of Birth

Gloucestershire	Gloucester
Hampshire	Basingstoke
Hertfordshire	Berkhampton, Rickmansworth
Lancashire	Whathern (?), Wigan
Leicestershire	Leicester, Woodhouse
Northamptonshire	Chacombe, Daventry, Thrapston
Oxfordshire	Staple (sic - Steeple) Aston
Shropshire	Condover
Staffordshire	Burton, Brownhills, Coppice, Derrington, Handsworth, Packington.
Suffolk	Framden, Ipswich
Sussex	Bexhill-on-Sea
Warwickshire	Bickenhill, Blockley, Coleshill, Coughton, Ettington Fillongley, Foleshill, Great Packington, Hampton on the Hill, Kingsbury, Moerton Morrell (2), Welford, Whitacre.
Wiltshire	Wishford
Worcestershire	Bredon (2), Cofton Hackett, Quinton (2)

## Occupations

As enumerators would use their own descriptors to classify the occupations of those in employment, direct comparison with the similar analysis undertaken earlier for Curdworth Enumeration District 18 is at best reasonably close or possibly slightly conjectural. This particular applies to the term *General Labourer* as used by Wilkins. Did these possibly equate to Labourers on the Sewage Farm, a descriptor used by his colleague, Thomas Negus?

John Watson from Scotland lived on the Home Farm, Tyburn, with his wife, 2 daughters and a visitor, Archibald Duff who was described as a Congregational Minister and Professor of Hebrew. John was, perhaps, the most senior person employed on-site as he was a Civil Engineer and General Manager for the Drainage Board.

He may well have been supported by Gordon Smith, also from Scotland, who was a Clerk of Works (Local Sanitation)

There were 2 Gangers over Excavators and 1 Ganger for Navy Land Draining. A foreman for Labourers is mentioned as well as a Colliery Agent (Mine Manager) who may have had nothing to do with the new Sewage Farm unless he was providing some expertise as beds were dug.

A Sewage Inspector and Brook Surveyor (Corporation Farm) are recorded as well as an Engineer's Assistant, who presumably helped John Watson.

Wilkins uses a number of descriptors for Land Drainage workers. There were 2 Draniers (Land); 5 described as being a Navy with 2 identified as Navy – Land Drainage. 20 were known as Navy, Excavator Land Drainage, 1 as an

Excavator on Draining and another as a Navy Excavator plus another who was a Navy on Drainage. Were these all fulfilling the same role?

There were 26 men called General Labourers and 6 described as General Labourers Farm. This latter group were all from Ireland. It is feasible that they were working on the Sewage Farm as opposed to an Agricultural Farm.

2 more were Farm Labourers Sewage and a final worker was described as a Farm Labourer Floater (with the O<sup>7/1</sup> abbreviation next to this). Researching this description would suggest that this was *A person who irrigates or floods land to regulate its water content – e.g. marshes, fields, water meadows* so it is quite possible that he was used for this purpose on the Board's new site.

There were a number of engine drivers – 1 was an Engine Driver (Pumping); 3 were Engine Drivers (Portable) while there were 2 Stationary Engine Drivers and a Stoker.

Other workers who might have been associated with the new development were 2 bricklayers, 3 Bricklayer's Labourers and a Bricklayer's Navy. A carpenter lived nearby, too.

Canal or river based roles included a Toll Collector (Late joiner), a Waterman (Barge) and 3 who were each described as Waterman on Sewage Farm. This latter group could well have been also known as Drowners who were men *who understood irrigation. (They were) appointed to control the watering of the common water meadows, especially in Dorset, Wiltshire, Avon and Hampshire. (Website hosted by Janet & Michael Woods).*

Railway workers are prominent but there is no clear way to separate out those who may have worked on the Sewage Farm internal railway or those who worked the main line. Their roles included a Track Foreman, Locomotive Driver, 4 Signalmen, 2 Platelayers, 1 Railway Shunter Points, a Goods Porter and 2 Labourers on the Railway Wagon Works.

At the nearby Plants Brook Waterworks lived a number of other workers including an Engineer (M.E.) an Engine Driver, a Record Keeper, an Engine Stoker, Steam Pump Driver, Stoker, Boiler Cleaner, Engine Cleaner, General Labourer and a Labourer.



**Crossing Water Orton Lane 1983**

## Minworth Enumeration District 19

The boundary changes that were introduced for the 1901 census reduced Minworth to a core of some 60 persons as recorded by Thomas Henry Wilkins, most living in the area known as The Bull Ring. So it is not surprising that only a few are of interest in this research.

One property was described as the Drainage Board Offices but it only housed a retired Post Man & Caretaker, his wife and grandson.

3 Carpenter, joiners lived in the 2 Bay Cottages by the Green and may have worked on the sewage farm.

Those that can definitely be assigned to the new works included –

a Waterman on Sewage Farm born in Sutton Coldfield

a Sewage Floater, born in Great Barford, Oxfordshire

a Floater at Sewage Farm from Ireland.

(Each of these roles has been described above.)

The youngest of the workers, a boy of 13 years from Minworth, was a Sewage Farm Plough Lad.



**A typical navy gang**

## **The Sewage Farm in Operation**

Between 1901 and 1911 as the navvies left and the farm began to function so there came a significant change to the relevant occupations recorded in the next census. The numbers employed grew, too, as did the range of skills needed to ensure the Sewage was treated appropriately and safely.

### **Curdworth and Wishaw Enumeration District 17**

Enumeration Districts were altered for the 1911 Census with Curdworth now paired with the neighbouring hamlet of Wishaw

Some 23 males in this District were working at the Sewage Farm for the Tame & Rea Drainage Board.

3 were born between 1840 & 49 with the majority born between 1860 and 1879. The oldest was 70 years old and the youngest was 17.

A very different pattern of birthplaces now emerges with the departure of the navvies once the Sewage Farm beds and associated infrastructure works had been completed.

Of those born in Warwickshire the majority were local. 8 came from Curdworth. Others were from Bodymoore Heath (1), Erdington Workhouse (1), Shipston on Stour (2), Tyburn (1), Water Orton (1), Wishaw (2). 2 others were born in the county.

2 came from Oxfordshire – Middleton Cheney and Todmorton.

2 came from Worcestershire – Birlingham and Stourbridge

One came from Oundle in Northamptonshire, another from Ludlow in Shropshire and one was said to have been Born At Sea.

### **Occupations**

These were of a limited variety.

19 worked for the Drainage Board/Sewage Farm. Most described themselves as General Labourers the others simply as Labourers. There was also one who described himself a Navy.

2 worked as Bacteria Bed Labourers and 1 as a Waterman.

There were also 2 railway workers – a shunter and a porter – but these may have been working on the mainline.

2 Market Gardeners are recorded and it is very likely that they benefitted from working close to a ready source of fertiliser and the proximity of the canal to transport their produce into Birmingham.

## **Minworth Enumeration District 18**

In 1901 Minworth hardly existed as a Census District with only 60 persons living there but by 1911 it had been considerably expanded, helped by the Tame & Rea Drainage Board's housing constructed for its employees. Boundary changes to this Enumeration District also added to the increase in inhabitants recorded.

The age range of those who worked at the sewage works range from 72 years of age to his young as 15 years of age. The majority were born between 1860 1889 with most being born between 1817 and 1879.

Many of the workers came from local settlements. Apart from 14 who were born in Minworth, we find that 1 was born in Sutton Coldfield, 1 in Water Orton, 1 in Castle Bromwich, 1 from Walmley and another from Walmley Ash.

Slightly further away were individuals who were born in Erdington, Quinton, Olton, 1 from Bromford, 2 from Birmingham and 2 from Tyburn.

Others who were born in Warwickshire came from nearby Coventry – 2 from Eastern Green and 1 from Foleshill, 1 from Atherstone 1 from Coleshill, and 1 from Shustoke.

Slightly further way, but still from Warwickshire, were workers who were born in Binton, Radford Semele, Rowington, Stratford-on-Avon, and Warwick.

Other Counties of birth included –

Bedfordshire – Woolton

Cheshire – Knutsford, Sandbach

Derbyshire - Markeaton

Essex – Harlow

Gloucestershire – Ails(?)

Herefordshire

London

Northamptonshire – Ashby St. Ledger, Everdon, Northampton & Towcester

Oxfordshire – Kidlington, Oxford, Shipton, Shipton on Cherwell, Todmorton (2)

Rutland - Morcott

Shropshire – Clive, Stottesdon

Staffordshire – Burton on Trent, Derrington, Lichfield (2), Packington, Walsall, Willenhall

Yorkshire – Alverthorpe

Ireland – 1 and 1 from Mayo

Scotland – Banff & Forfar

Canada – Quebec.



## Occupations

The diverse roles now undertaken by those who worked on the Sewage Farm is made very clear by an examination of those who lived in Minworth and were described as either working for the Drainage Board, Corporation Sewage Works or Sewage Farm.

2 were Civil Engineers –

Arthur Bryan came from Sandbach (b. 1873) and he was the Engineer for Sewage Disposal employed by Birmingham Tame & Rea Drainage Board. In 1901, he had been working and living in Nuneaton, not many miles from Minworth. With him were his wife, Lilian (born in Hull in 1874) and their young son, Arthur (b. 1894 in Hull).

By 1911 Arthur was living in The Hall, Minworth. This would have been near Water Orton Lane. The family employed a Domestic Servant, Hannah Goodger whose father, George, was a lock keeper at nearby Dunton (See also A Cut Around Sutton Coldfield by the author <https://sclhrg.org.uk/research/118-original-research/2174-a-cut-around-sutton-coldfield.html>).

The other engineer, John Duncan Watson from Forfar, was said to working for the Drainage Board. John and his family had been living in Home Farm, Minworth in 1901 when he was described as a Civil Engineer (General Manager). Now he and his family lived in Drainage Board housing in nearby Tyburn. His son, David Mowat, was an engineering student at the University of Birmingham.

There was a Superintendent of Works (Sewage Farm). He was Gordon Smith who had been born in Banff, Macduff, and had previously been described as a Clerk of Works (Sanitation) in 1901.

There was a Sewage Farm Inspector, George Line, born in Woolton, Bedfordshire who was employed by the City Council.

George had apparently made good progress in his employment as he was only a Cattleman on Farm living in Walmley Ash in 1901.

Others with responsibility were a Bacteria Bed Foreman, a Head Gardener and Forester, a Head Gardener, a Farm Manager (Sewage Farm) and a Farm Foreman (Sewage Works).

4 employees described themselves as Attendants – one was a Silt Tank Attendant (Sewage Farm), two were described as Sewage Attendant, Bacteria Beds, and the final worker described himself simply as a Sewage Attendant.

There were, of course many labourers at work on the Sewage Farm –

3 were recorded as General Labourers (Sewage Works) while 3 others said they were General Labourers (Sewage Farm).

In addition, there were 14 General Labourers (Drainage Board) and a Gardener's labourer (Drainage Board)

Many worked on the Farm –

5 were General Farm Labourers (Drainage Board) and 2 were also General Farm labourers (Sewage Farm). There were 5 Farm Labourers (Sewage Farm) and also 3 Farm Labourers (Drainage Board). 1 said he was a Labourer on Sewage Farm, another was a Labourer Bacteria Bed while one was a Corporation labourer (Drainage Board)

There was a Stockman on Farm (Drainage Board) and a Cowman on Sewage Farm.

A Herdsman on Farm (Drainage Board) was employed as well as a Carter (Sewage Farm) and a Carter (Drainage Board).

There were 3 Waggoners on Sewage Farm (Drainage Board), a Horsekeeper, Sewage Farm and a Coachman and Caretaker (Drainage Board)

Other occupations included a Bricklayer's Labourer (Drainage Board), a General Fitter (Sewage Works), a Mechanic on Motor Pumps and a Day Watchman (tramway) Sewage Farm

Office staff included a Clerk (Birmingham Drainage Works) and 2 Office Work typists (Drainage Board)

Plants Brook Waterworks staff noted in the census included –

Thomas Hailstone (b. 1856 in Curdworth) was the Reservoir Keeper. James William Scattergood (b. 1873 in Curdworth) worked as a General Labourer and lived with his father, William, (b. 1843 in Fillongley) who was described as a Pensioner and formerly a General Labourer for the Corporation Waterworks.



**Plants Brook Reservoir and Pumping Station 1902**

## **Sources**

Census records and other associated materials available through Ancestry.

Samuel Hughes - A Treatise on Waterworks for the Supply of Cities and Towns 1882

Brenda Ward – Birmingham Canal Navigations Society – Entrance to Sewage Wharf Arm at Minworth photograph

Bill Dargue – Local History web site

John Morris Jones – Maps of Birmingham

Wikipedia (Thomas Hawksley photograph) & Ordnance Survey (maps)

Geoff Bateson – A History of Castle Vale – background information, steam ploughs at work and overhead sewage sludge trough photographs

Sutton Coldfield Local History Archives relating to Minworth Sewage Works (authors unknown)

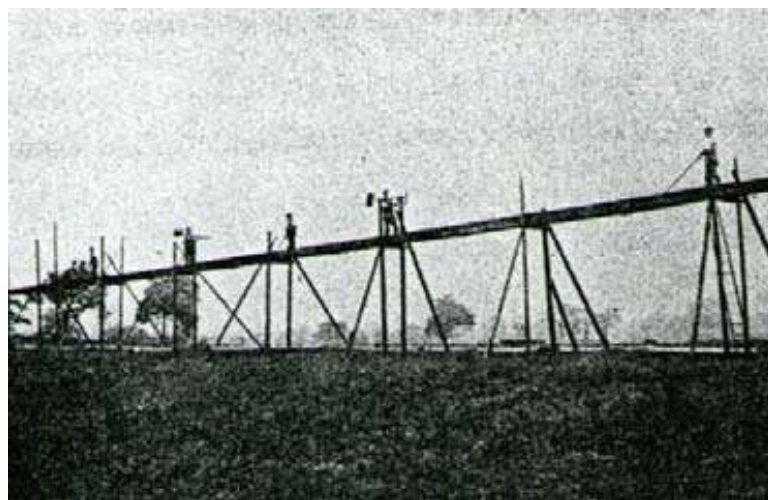
Warwickshire Railways web site - Bagnall 0-2-0 & Crossing Water Orton Lane industrial locomotive photographs

Drainfast web site – A Typical Navy Gang photograph

## **Acknowledgements**

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**Sludge Trough used 1877-1901**