

Pumps and wells at 1:2500

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The 1887 1:2500 survey of Harmston shows an awful lot of pumps. If we ignore the small part of the village which lies on Lincs 78.14, there are 14 pumps and five wells. Look at the same area on the 1904 edition and one finds 14 wells and a windpump but no ordinary pumps at all. Of the 14 wells, three were there in 1887, three appear totally new, and eight correspond to pumps on the 1887 survey. The windpump is a new machine supplying the walled gardens at the greatly-enlarged Harmston Hall. So could it be that Captain Cockburn at the Hall, though anxious to enjoy the benefits of technology himself¹ was so determined that his tenants should live in picturesque rusticity that he had ordered all their cottage pumps to be torn up and sent for scrap? It seems implausible; besides, he did not own the entire village.

What seems to be behind the change is the Ordnance Survey. The principle being followed at the 1887 survey appears to have been essentially one of showing what was there – at least what was out in the open. The move towards labour-saving kitchens had started even then and the better sort of house might well have the luxury of a pump at the scullery sink rather than out in the yard. That at least was the position in Lincolnshire. Inspection of contemporary sheets elsewhere shows a surprising variation in the density of pumps and wells. Of course, by this date some rural areas did have piped water supplies. Other areas lacked suitable aquifers and relied on rainwater or the occasional very deep public well. Nevertheless, some of the variability may stem from inconsistencies in survey.

In 1904, the OS seems to have changed its policy. Richard Oliver has kindly provided an extract from the Southampton Circulars.²

Re pgh 148, p.19 of 'Instructions to Revisers' [not available, but evidently the *Instructions to Examiners* of 1884: see *Instructions to Field Examiners*, 1905]: to be altered to 'Care is to be taken to show wells or springs at farms or cottages, as they indicate the water supply, but natural springs should not be shown as wells, and artificial wells should not be called springs. Public pumps and water taps are shown – ie those that discharge in roads, streets, or other public situations – but not those in back yards or private enclosures. Fountains are shown.' ... 'On page 28 the word 'Public' is to be inserted before Pump.'

No longer is the surveyor merely to record what he sees. Rather he is to take an intelligent interest in 'the water supply', but on behalf of whom? A cavalry officer (say) might wish to know where he might water his horses, but he would not be carrying a large-scale plan. At least the surveyor was not required to pass judgement on the potability of the water. But he may have been expected to make enquiries: the 1932 edition of the *Instructions to Field Examiners* noted that 'rain water sunken tanks must not be shown as wells'. On the limestone belt,

¹ By 1914 he had a telephone line to the railway station, a motor car, and a gas engine – presumably to drive a generator.

² Book 2, f.1A – C.C.205, 25:9:1904.

many of the farms and even larger cottages had brick cisterns into which rain water from roofs was conducted; it was used for washing (especially of clothes), being pumped up as required. At least one of the Harmston cisterns could be reached from the yard by a circular shaft, as though it were a well.³

The expression 'farms or cottages' in the instruction is an unfortunate one. Should it be understood as 'farms and *isolated* cottages'? After all, in Harmston virtually all the dwelling houses would be regarded as cottages. Was the exclusion of higher-status houses intentional? Perhaps there is an implicit assumption that their inhabitants will not be reliant on rainwater.

In Lincolnshire the new instruction appears to have been taken quite literally, including the requirement that *care is to be taken*. Private pumps were indeed deleted but if it could be established that the pump drew water from a proper well, then that well seems to have been shown. Thus we have the conversion of eight of Harmston's 1887 pumps into wells. Inspection of a couple of dozen Lincolnshire 1:2500 sheets suggests that this interpretation applied to most of the sheets bearing a revision date of 1904 and all of those having a date of 1905.

Elsewhere, the instruction appears to have been interpreted as applying to isolated settlements only. In consequence, sheets show almost no pumps and only a few wells. From 1906, Lincolnshire too adopted this interpretation.

Richard Oliver has observed that large-scale revision was handled by divisional offices, the Lincolnshire work coming under the Derby office. Derby was also responsible for parts of Lancashire, and Richard found a number of sheets there (bearing a 1904 revision date) that appeared to follow the Lincolnshire interpretation.⁴ Without knowing the exact boundaries of Derby's responsibilities, one cannot say whether this applied throughout Derby's fiefdom. There are two further problems with Lancashire: first, that the early spread of piped water supplies there may have meant that few wells survived; secondly, that no-one seems to have interpreted *cottages* to include urban housing. So much of Lancashire (especially the sheets in the Godfrey edition) was urbanised that it can be difficult to decide which interpretation the surveyors were following.

The question that started this investigation, of what was happening at Harmston, seems now to have been satisfactorily answered. The one that remains is the apparent diversity of practice on pre-1904 1:2500 sheets: how much does this reflect diversity of landscape as opposed to diversity of surveying practice? To put it another way, what deduction (if any) can we make from the absence of a 'P' or 'W' on a map of this era? That is a question which can only be answered by comparing the maps with photographic or documentary evidence for the water supply at the time of survey. Readers having such evidence are invited to communicate it, either directly to me or via the pages of *Sheetlines*.

³ One of our older inhabitants, playing as a child in that yard, fell into this shaft. His mother noted the absence of noise, came out to look for him, and found him hanging from the brick lining by his fingers.

⁴ Lancs 110.2, 110.6, 110.9.