

## The Mystery of the Findon High Street Pump and Well

Archaeologists are always interested in the position and locational contexts of sites. Right here in Findon we have an unusual survival of a probable early Victorian or even Georgian hand pump and well, contained within a well-preserved cover house (fig.1). Substantial as the structure is it would be easy to miss. The well abuts the north side of Pebble Cottage accessed through a small gate just two steps away from the High Street. The pump house structure, which is Grade II listed, together with the pump and well appear to straddle the former boundary between the Averys complex adjacent to The Avenue/Monarch's Way and Grey Walls to the north (see fig. 2). These two houses are respectively recorded as 18th and early 19th century. The well site is in the ownership of Findon Parish Council.

The hand pump is comprised of what is described as a single throw flywheel connecting to cogs, which when turned, drives a rod down to the water table where a pumping chamber is located. Under pressure the water is then forced from the chamber into a small diameter pipe and the water rises to the surface. So it is purely mechanical. At ground level the delivery pipe is missing but all the existing components are made of iron. The well is likely to be somewhere in the region of 140 feet deep.

The iron frame informs us that the manufacturer is Hayward Tyler and Co, London. It has been difficult to ascertain the exact date of the pump site. However, the well house itself is recorded as 19th c. but can we be more specific? First of all Hayward Tyler & Co was founded in London in 1815 and has a long history of change and innovation up to the present day. So it has to be 1815 or later. Significantly however, a large works was built in Luton in 1871 and subsequently manufacturing seems to have been transferred there. This suggests that the Findon Well House pumping mechanism predates 1871. Nevertheless it is odd that the well is not shown on the 1st and 2nd edition 6in OS maps of 1875 and 1897 - which they often are. Furthermore, the pump house structure is in remarkably good condition for a freestanding building of more than 150 years. However, its construction is very similar to a pumphouse building at Buckhurst Park, Withyham, East Sussex. This too, houses a Hayward Tyler and Co. pumping mechanism and is specifically dated to 1876 and was manufactured in Luton. So typologically there is some contemporaneity between the two pumphouse buildings. It is probable therefore that the Findon Well House has been subjected to considerable refurbishment and repair over the years.

The 1839 Tithe Map of Findon (fig. 2) potentially provides some contextual information regarding our inquiries into the date and perhaps the rationale for this elaborate well complex. Plot 189 on the Tithe Map shows The Averys, ie the main house. The location of the smaller Pebble Cottage fronts the High Street. The well, which is not shown, is adjacent, as mentioned, to the north side of the latter building. Behind this building is an L-shaped structure. The fact that these 3 buildings are all in the same plot (ie 189) in 1839 suggests that Pebble Cottage and the L-shaped building were ancillary to the main house at this time.

It is possible, though not proven by the author that Pebble Cottage was then a coach house, and its configuration today might suggest this. Furthermore, it is possible that the L-shaped building was a stable block. So the position of an elaborate well and water pump producing greater quantities of water would be an important requirement in such circumstances. Additional to this the Tithe Apportionment indicates that in 1839 the Rev. Alfred Lyall curate at St John the Baptist, Findon (from 1829) lived at The Averys. Alfred came from a distinguished Victorian family and was an inveterate author and traveller at home and abroad. His elder brother George was an MP for the City of London and two of Alfred's sons were knighted for services to India. The family also lived at Greypoint House in The Square around this time opposite where the old village pump, no longer extant, was situated. The perambulations of Victorian clergy are well known and the need for horses and stabling would have been paramount for this family.

Findon High Street of course lies along the route of the lowest part of the chalk dry valley. So this line would be where the least depths to the chalk aquifer would occur. Due to the north-south gradient the greater depths would be to the north. Although over 70 wells have been recorded along this line between North End and the Quadrangle to the south the actual number of wells is said to be relatively small. This is because the water table is at some depth and lies approximately between 140-180 feet below ground with some recorded at greater depths. The cost of digging and boring wells and the labour of drawing water would preclude many from attempting to dig a well. Furthermore, in the 1890's two well wardens were appointed for Findon and it was their job to ensure that all wells were being properly maintained. Therefore, only the better off are likely to have had their own wells. Mains water did not come to Findon until 1928 so reliance on communal wells before this date, like the one in The Square or to the rear of The Gun Inn, would have been a vital resource for the local community. However, a few instances have recently come to light in Findon of brick built domestic cisterns/reservoirs constructed adjacent to some properties. These structures were reliant on run-off and provided domestic water to individual or groups of houses. Some examples of these have been recorded in the High Street (RB) and Northview Terrace (DN). They are likely to have been built in the late Victorian or Edwardian periods and were undoubtedly installed because of the depth to the actual water table and obviated the need for a deep well.

Much of the above is of course conjectural. However, if the timelines stated are correct then it is entirely feasible that a very well connected Victorian family with political and colonial associations would have had the need and the means for ensuring they had the availability of a reliable and abundant water source. This would be particularly relevant if a stabling yard as mooted, was located at the premises. Coming from such a family the Rev Alfred Lyall might also have seen it as incumbent on him to provide an essential resource to the parishioners. Its ease of access to the High Street would certainly facilitate this. There are of course a number of other explanations for the siting and elaborate nature of this well

complex and therein lies the mystery. Nevertheless, the author would be grateful to hear of other views or knowledge regarding this important part of Findon's heritage.

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**The Findon Pump and Well House (fig. 1)**

**(Photo: D. Dunkin)**



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The Findon Tithe Map of 1839 (WSCC)

(The Averys Complex: Plot 189)(fig. 2)

