

Sanitation

It took so long for Chinnor to get mains water that a question was asked in the House of Commons by Sir G. Fox to the Minister of Health as to when the water supply to Chinnor would be available. However, the then Minister, Mr. Bevan, was unable to say when a piped supply would be installed. This statement is slightly misleading. The question of a mains water supply to Chinnor had exercised the Parish Council since 1923 when the Ministry of Health requested a representative from Chinnor to decide if Chinnor's objection to the laying on of water by the Monks and Risborough Water Company be overruled. (No reason was given as to why Chinnor Parish Council objected to the proposal.) In April 1926 the Women's Institute tabled a motion expressing their concerns about the safety of water from the wells for the new council houses, that the wells were being contaminated by builders' dirty buckets. However, in 1930 the Council decided that the existing water supply (via the village wells) was good and a new (piped) supply was not needed.¹ However, Jim Rose recalled that lack of water was a problem in a dry year and recalls his wife getting water for his cows from Chinnor spring half a mile from the farm buildings, bringing the water back and filling the storage tank, which was a backbreaking job.

The issue of mains water continued to be debated throughout the 1930s. In December 1933 the Chinnor WI sent a resolution to the Oxfordshire Federation of Women's Institutes annual meeting that there should be good water supplies in all villages. This resolution was adopted. In November 1934, the council rejected a proposed water supply scheme as inadequate as it would only supply part of the Parish and would be very costly (prices not indicated in the minutes). In 1938 the offer of a mains supply of water was again refused by the Council in spite of it being advocated by residents. However, by 1944 an outline for a new water scheme for the village was discussed. The conditions in Chinnor were echoed in the *Education Report 1923* which reported that few villages had an adequate water supply a number of people having to rely on rain water or by means of wells which were often shallow and very likely to be polluted resulting in the ever present menace of cholera.

In 1944 an article was published in the WI magazine *Home and Country* pointing out that now (1944) a plentiful supply of pure water has become a necessity for modern living and noting that the danger of water from a polluted well and the time spent collecting water as wasted time. There was also, an article on 'Managing an earth closet' detailing the equipment needed, for example, two buckets, one for urine and one for 'night soil. These should not be mixed to avoid 'unpleasantness.' Other requirements included: dry earth, a plot of land 10 square yards and vegetable matter. Over the years the magazine, featured a number of advertisements for indoor sanitation for a range of automatic flushing toilets which could be used without mains water or sewage disposal. For example, in 1930 the Building and Domestic Supply Company produced an Elsan indoor chemical toilet which offered 'rural sanitary comfort with the comfort and refinements of city sanitation' for £3 18s 6d. Another advertisement in 1944 by Destrol offered an 'age-old sanitation problem

solved' 'A boon to the country dweller' priced at £19 16s. easy terms available.² The text accompanying a picture of Herbie Turner's shop, which was the nearest thing in Chinnor to a supermarket because of the range of goods it sold, indicated that 'lavatory buckets' were on sale there. In an interview in 1990, Joyce Pearson recall that 'eventually' her family got an indoor Elsan although no date was given.

A frequent result of contaminated water and poor sanitation was the diarrhoea which killed many thousands of babies every year. However, a review of the death certificates of Chinnor residents aged 0-40 years between 1894-1941 indicated very few deaths due to diarrhoea, a total of five, the most cases three being in July and August 1899. (peak period for enteric illnesses). See Appendix B. In 1895 seven, year old Mercy Burton died of exhaustion following gastro enteritis, the next fatality not occurring until 1904. Of course, this does not mean there were no other cases and the list of death certificates is not complete as some were not retrievable from the Records Office. Also, it was not a notifiable disease possibly because the condition was regarded as inevitable.

In rural areas which were animal dependant for a livelihood such as cattle, sheep and horses, the problem of disposing of animal waste, particularly in the summer months with the swarms of flies providing a vector linking humans to the bacteria on animal and human waste, was an urgent necessity. In addition to this was the removal of human waste and domestic refuse. This need became urgent during the 1920s and 1930s due to the changes in food provision including tinned food resulting in an explosion of non- combustible packaging. Thame Rural District had public systems of drainage for parts of Chinnor but no public system of 'scavenging' meaning, refuse collection. In 1930 the Women's Institute sent a letter to the Parish Council requesting the inauguration of a refuse collection which they followed up in 1931. The Council decided to hold the issue over for more information.

In April 1931 a letter was sent to the District Council requesting a district collection of rubbish. In June 1931 the District Council stated that it was prepared to start a rubbish collection in Chinnor and the surrounding areas if all parties were in agreement. The WI kept up the pressure on Council during 1933 and it was still being discussed in Council in 1934. There is a slight anomaly between the two sets of records; the Chinnor WI in October 1933 reported the inauguration of a rubbish collection which was met with great enthusiasm by the members although no further details are reported. In September 1944, a fortnightly collection of rubbish was requested.
