Farnsfield Waterworks

In 1891 the Newark Waterworks Company was bought out by the Newark Corporation which immediately started looking for a new site for an enlarged waterworks. Almost half the houses in the borough of Newark were still using unsafe backyard wells and public pumps for their water supply and diseases such as typhoid and cholera, attributable to overcrowding and unclean water supplies, were at epidemic levels. Testing at Farnsfield showed that the quality of water from the local bunter sandstone was excellent and the Corporation applied to Parliament for the necessary permission to construct a new waterworks there. An Act of Parliament was granted and construction work commenced.

In June 1893 a sum of £300 was sent to the Midland Railway Company for the erection of a siding for coal to be delivered to the site. In October that year it was reported that the principal pipe had been laid as far as the junction of the Great North road at Newark and half a million gallons of water a day was now passing through the connected pipework to the town. Pipes to supply Southwell, Halam and Norwood Hall Farm had been laid and a well was being sunk at Farnsfield. Tenders for the construction and erection of an engine and boiler house, chimney, cottages and other buildings and a cooling pond were invited in February 1894. It took several more years for all the work to be completed at a total cost of £128,000. At the official opening on 5th August 1898 Mr Doubleday, chairman of the Waterworks Committee declared it value for money. A report from the medical officer of health pointed out that typhoid fever had gradually disappeared from the time the new water was supplied.

The original works at Farnsfield were designed by Mr Henry Rofe, Consulting Engineer from London and consisted of a well with two steam-driven beam engines to extract water to a reservoir at Halam and along a 12-mile additional main to Beacon Hill on the east side of Newark. An additional reservoir was added at Beacon Hill in 1903. In 1927, a new building was erected alongside the old one and two Worthington-Simpson electrically driven pumps were installed. Worthington-Simpson, based at Balderton, near Newark was one of the foremost pump manufacturers of the twentieth century. The steam engines were kept in working order as a stand-by in case of a breakdown until an oil-driven plant was added in the 1940s. Water was piped to subscribers in and around Newark and through an additional pipe system to the villages between Farnsfield and Newark. In the month of June 1955, it was recorded that almost 43 million gallons of water was pumped from the Farnsfield works.

There are two notebooks in the FLHS archives containing weekly records of workers involved in the construction and running of the waterworks dated from October 1894 until March 1897. The work was often sporadic. A full week for a labourer was 10 hours a day weekdays and 5½ hours on a Saturday paid at 5d an hour. Some days there was no work recorded and the reduced wages paid reflect the uncertainty of their employment. On average there were 11 men employed in 1894 including engineers, labourers and carpenters. This rose to 25 in 1896 as work on site construction and the sinking of the well continued, some jobs recorded as ‘bore’ ‘sinking’ or ‘heading’ denoted their particular job. Hourly pay rates varied from 5d for labourers to 6/- for sinking.

Work at the Waterworks continued until 1901 when the contract for construction was completed and 16 'useful cart horses' were offered for sale by Messrs Fotherby, Contract Office, Farnsfield.
In September 1896 it is recorded that Wilfred Dean, aged 13 was paid a rate of 2d per hour helping out as necessary and running errands. Wilfred was a local boy born in Farnsfield in 1882. After a number of other jobs including working as a drayman for a local grocery store, he went back to work at the Waterworks and in 1939 he was a pump attendant.

Above & below : building of the Waterworks 1897

Photograph taken at the official opening of the Farnsfield Waterworks on Friday 5th August 1898

Below: Attendees at the opening

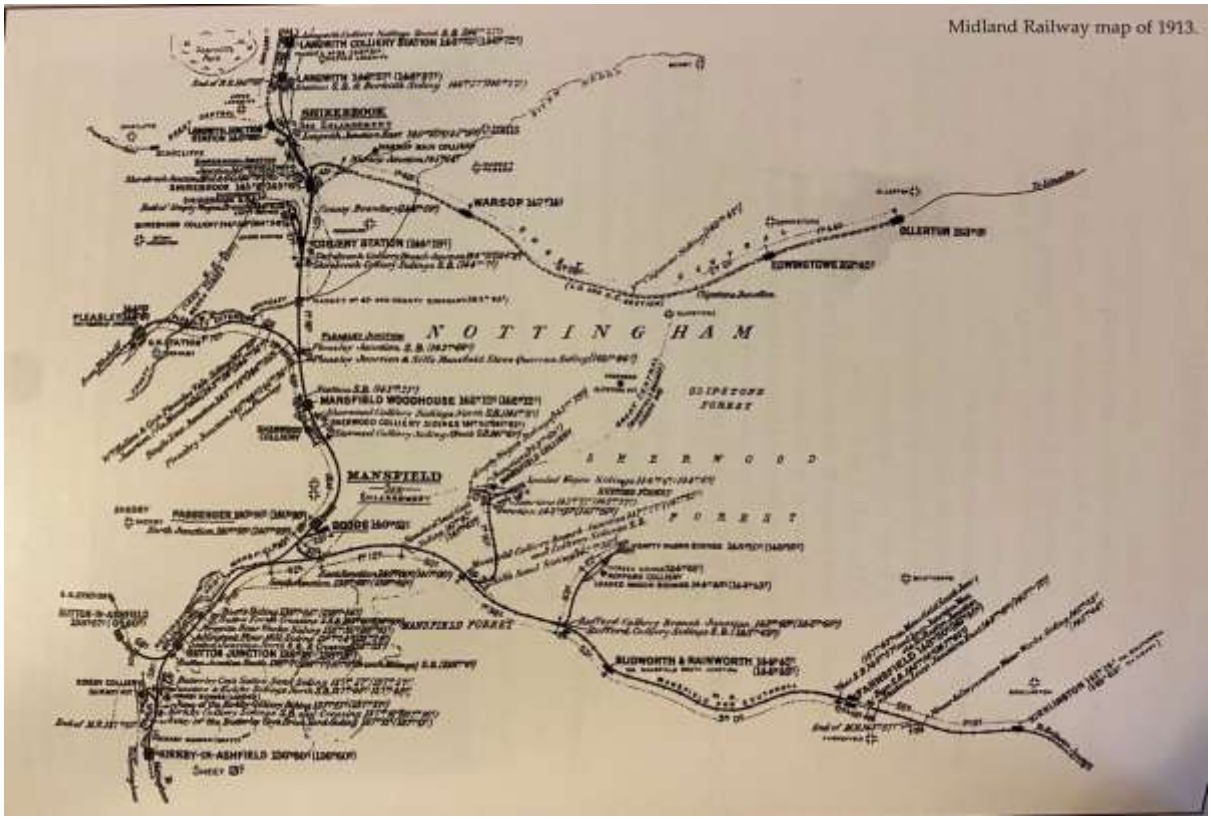
Front row (left to right): Councillors W. F. Atter, T. Smith, The Mayor (Coun. E. P. Milthorp), Ald. T. Earp, Coun. J. Crossley.

Second row: L. Priestley, Dr. Wills (Medical Officer) and Mrs. Wills, Councillors W. E. Knight and J. Sherrett, Ald. J. Saunders, Coun. W. Doubleday, H. Pink (Waterworks Engineer), Coun. Crossland, E. T. Simmons, Godfrey Tallents (Town Clerk).

Third row: H. Paine, Mr. Postill, Ex-Inspector Free, C. J. Archard, George Horspool (Sanitary Inspector), Cornelius Brown (Editor, "Newark Advertiser").

Also present may be seen: J. C. Kew, George Mackenzie, Gordon Halls, George Walker, Seth Eason, T. A. Watford, T. Hufton, C. E. Ford, G. W. Ford, Supt. Hopkinson, H. Rofe (Consulting Engineer), F. Richmond, Rev. R. A. McKee, W. C. Halls, G. E. Kirkland (Southwell), Mr. Roe (Engineer), H. J. Bliss, E. C. Perfect.

The Waterworks



Map showing the Waterworks railway siding on the far-right hand side for the delivery of coal for the steam pumps

Waterworks cooling pond about 1925.

From Peter Milner: “This picture is the waterworks cooling pond for the steam engine pumps, it was taken by my Dad (Frederick ‘Ted’ Milner) on his new Box Brownie in about 1925.”

Picture taken in 1925. Frederick ‘Ted’ Milner in the middle

(photos by kind permission of Peter Milner)

Farnsfield Water Pumping Station, 1947

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Demolition of the waterworks tower, 20th May 1967. (Photos by Peter Milner)

Below – Present day buildings