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London Borough of Enfield Local History Sheets.

Water supply in Enfield a history

Bush Hill Waterworks

Set up in 1875 by the Bush Hill Park Estate Company. Problems with the well meant that the supply was intermittent. The installation was acquired by the New River Company in 1887. The former water tower survives as a private house in Quakers Walk. In 1925 the well was filled in.

Bycullah Waterworks

Set up to supply the Bycullah Estate which was developed from 1879. The waterworks was situated at the cul de sac end of Rowantree Road. The installation was bought by the Enfield Waterworks in 1894. It was still functioning (under the control of the Metropolitan Water Board as late as 1923).

East London Waterworks

Set up by Act of Parliament in 1807. It incorporated the former waterworks at Shadwell and West Ham. The Hackney Waterworks was absorbed in 1830. In 1893 an Act of Parliament gave the company powers to build a chain of reservoirs in the Lee Valley. In 1904 these powers passed to the newly formed Metropolitan Water Board which had taken over from the company. The Banbury Reservoir and Lockwood Reservoirs were completed in 1903 followed by the King George V Reservoir in 1913. Work started on the Girling Reservoir in 1935. (The site had been used for a temporary airfield during World War I). Work was interrupted by World War II, the reservoir being completed in 1951. All these reservoirs drew their water from the River Lee which occasionally ran low in times of drought. In 1960 an extra source of supply was made available with the completion of a tunnel bringing untreated water from the Thames at Hampton to the King George V Reservoir.

Enfield Waterworks

The Enfield Local Board of Health (the direct ancestor of the modern local authority), acting under powers granted in the 1848 Public Health Act, set up a municipal waterworks in 1855, with a well and pumping station at Alma Road, Ponders End and a reservoir on Holtwhites Hill. An extra well was sunk on land behind Eagle House in Ponders End High Street (acquired 1867). An additional reservoir to serve the eastern half of Enfield was built on a land to the north of Southbury Road (acquired 1866). The Bycullah Waterworks (see above) was taken over in 1894. An additional pumping station was built at Hadley Road in 1902. In June 1904 the waterworks was sold to the Metropolitan Water Board (see below).

Lee Valley Water Company

This undertaking supplies water to parts of Cockfosters and Hadley Wood. It started life as the Barnet District Gas and Water Company, set up by Act of Parliament in 1872. In 1950 it was re-named the Barnet District Water Company after the gas undertaking had been nationalised. In 1960 the company merged with the Herts and Essex Water Company to form the Lee Valley Water Company.

Metropolitan Water Board

In the eighteen-nineties there were several unsuccessful attempts by the former London County Council to obtain powers to compulsorily acquire all the water undertakings in London. A royal commission reported in 1899 recommending the formation of a public body to take control of water supply in the metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Water Act of 1902 resulted in the setting up of the Metropolitan Water Board in 1903 with powers to take over water supply in the London region. The board was abolished in 1974 when the newly formed Thames Water Authority took control.

New River Company

The company was set up by Act of Parliament in 1606 to bring fresh water from springs near Ware to London. Construction began c1608/9 and was complete by 1613. The original course through Enfield differed considerably from the present course. A wide loop followed the course of the Cuffley Brook through Whitewebbs. The New River crossed the valley of Salmons Brook at Bush Hill by means of a lead and timber aqueduct. Another loop followed the course of Pymmes Brook through the Arnos Grove Estate. Further south, another loop made a wide detour via Wolves Lane, Devonshire Hill and White Hart Lane. The New River ended at New River Head at Clerkenwell from where the water was distributed to customers in the City of London and elsewhere.

In 1682 Salmons Brook (beneath the Bush Hill aqueduct) was cased in a brick culvert (the Clarendon Arch). The years 1784/8 saw a major operation to remove the Bush Hill aqueduct and replace it with the present earth embankment. In 1820 the Whitewebbs loop was shortened by the construction of a cast iron aqueduct (near Flash Lane) carrying the New River over the Cuffley Brook. Between 1831 and 1833 reservoirs were built at Stoke Newington. A pumping station was added in 1855. The eighteen-fifties saw a progressive shortening of the course with the abandonment of the Whitewebbs, Arnos and Tottenham loops.

Control of the New River passed in 1904 to the Metropolitan Water Board. (The New River Company, stripped of its best known asset, continued to exist as a property company). At some time prior to 1926 the Enfield loop, between Southbury Road and Bush Hill, was by-passed by means of cast iron pipes. As a result of bomb damage to the pipes in 1940, the loop was temporarily re-instated. At the time of writing (1991) the water from the New River is due to be diverted into the new London ring main. The course south of Cheshunt will then become redundant.

North Middlesex Waterworks

Sometimes known as the Colney Hatch Waterworks. Built to supply the Colney Hatch Park development at New Southgate in 1867. The waterworks (a well and pumping station) was sited on the east side of New Southgate High Road. It was then taken over in 1871 by the New River Company (see above). The well and pumping station were still in use as late as 1938.

Thames Water

Formed as the Thames Water Authority in 1974 to take over the water supply functions of the Metropolitan Water Board (see above) and the sewage

disposal functions of the local authorities. It became a public company in 1990.