

A HISTORY OF STAFFORDSHIRE POTTERIES WATER UNDERTAKING / BOARD 1845-1974

In 1844, The Buccleugh Commission was appointed to enquire into the state of large towns and populous districts in England and Wales. Their terms included the supply of water in such areas whether for purposes of health or for the better protection of property from fire. Out of those districts chosen, only six areas were deemed in any sense to have a good water supply, whereas thirteen were classified as indifferent and the rest bad.

The Commissioners recommended that it should be rendered imperative on local administrative bodies to procure sufficient supplies of water for all domestic, public and sanitary purposes. The Commission obtained their information about the areas via questionnaires and by personal inspection.

North Staffordshire, which comprises of the five towns of Stoke-on-Trent (Burslem, Tunstall, Hanley, Stoke and Longton) and the nearby town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, was one of the districts chosen due to its large industrial base of the Staffordshire Potteries, coal mining and steel production. It was noted that the water supplied from two reservoirs by pipes was of very indifferent quality but the water supplied from carts at a halfpenny a pailful was purer. Not all properties were connected to the pipe but those that were paid between 7/- and 21/- per annum based on which town they were in and also the size of the property although supplies were only switched on for 3 days per week in some areas.

Although the opening pages of the first minute book of the Staffordshire Potteries Water Undertaking held in the Town Hall in Hanley in October 1845 do not mention the Buccleugh Commission, it would seem more than a coincidence considering the dates. It was at this meeting that it was decided to engage a competent engineer to survey the District with the object of obtaining a sufficient supply of water for the Potteries. Mr Liddle Elliott was appointed the engineer and his report in July 1846 stated that a spring of water at Wall Grange would afford a sufficient supply of excellent quality water for the Potteries towns. A provisional committee met at the end of September 1846 to form a company and to issue a prospectus. His Grace, the Duke of Sutherland, on whose land the well at Wall Grange was sited, became Patron of the new Company.

The Company promoted a bill in Parliament which received Royal Assent in July 1847 which authorised the construction of works to enable springs, which were discharged into the River Churnet near Wall Grange, to be collected and pumped to a reservoir to be constructed at Ladderedge near to the town of Leek. Water could then gravitate from this reservoir to a proposed reservoir at Birches Head at the top of the town of Hanley and then pumped via mains to the Potteries towns and Newcastle-under-Lyme.



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The town of Longton to the east of Stoke-on-Trent also expressed a desire to participate in the scheme and a further works at Meir was proposed in the Act of 1849. The company also took over an additional source nearby called Normacot Springs. The available supplies at this time are recorded as 1,500,000 gallons per day from Wall Grange and 750,000 gallons from Meir and Normacot.

The Acts of 1853 and 1861 allowed the company to expand its operations further and also to extract more water at Wall Grange following the construction of Tittesworth and Deep Hayes Reservoirs to provide the compensation water to the River Churnet.

Meir Works was also extended and owing to the increases in both the area's population and its industry, further sources of water became essential and Stockton Brook works began pumping water in 1884.

Further Acts saw additional sources at Hatton (1888) and at Mill Meece (1912) pumping to a new reservoir at Hanchurch and also a new pumping station at Cresswell near to Blythe Bridge.

The Local Authorities in the area had long desired to take-over the Water Undertaking but the Staffordshire Potteries Water Board Act of 1924 saw the formation of the Staffordshire Potteries Water Board on 1st January 1925 with Mr R.C. Frain as Engineer and General Manager with Mr E.B. Sharpley as Clerk.

Over the following 25 years to the centenary of the Staffordshire Potteries Water Undertaking, the original pumping stations were all extended and new more modern engines were installed to further the reliance of the supply to the area which had a near tenfold increase in population over a period of 100 years.

The Act of 1937 increased the resources further with the approval of Peckforton and Tower Wood boreholes in Cheshire and Great Gate near to Cheadle. Further resources at Draycott Cross and Shaffalong were also added to meet increased demand in the area for munitions factories and other work in connection with the war effort.

In 1947, The Engineer and Manager to the Board reported on the existing and proposed sources of supply and also the works under construction. His recommendation was that the Board should obtain Parliamentary powers for the enlargement by raising the height of the dam of the two compensation reservoirs at Deep Hayes and Tittesworth and also to use them for public water supply. It was felt that when these works, along with the necessary filter stations, pumping stations and trunk mains, were completed that the water supply for the area would be assured for many years to come.

At the time, it was recorded that the Board supplied an area of 215.9 square miles covering the City of Stoke-on-Trent, the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the districts of Kidsgrove and Stone and parts of Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle. The population supplied was 372,000 although areas proposed to be added in 1950 would further increase this to 403,500.

The Board had 17 service reservoirs with the principal ones being sited at Ladderedge, Hanchurch, Birches Head, Meir and Goldenhill.

581 miles of mains were maintained by the 6 Distribution Depots (Hanley, Tunstall, Longton, Newcastle, Cheadle and Leek.

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During the late 1950's the dam at Tittesworth was raised to 70 feet high and then four years later a water treatment works was built to allow the reservoir water to be used as drinking water. The enlarged reservoir, which can now store up to 6.4 billion litres of water, was inaugurated by Princess Margaret in 1962. It now has a visitor centre in the village of Blackshaw Moor which was opened in 1998 and is a major tourist attraction in the Staffordshire Moorlands close to the town of Leek. Activities include walking, cycling, bird watching, watersports and fishing. Tittesworth pumps on average 28 million litres of water into the supply each day with a capacity of around 45 million litres a day.



The final two pumping stations to use steam power, both into the 1970's, were Cresswell, near to Blythe Bridge, and Mill Meece which is close to the town of Stone.

The pumping station at Mill Meece together with the steam driven plant pumped water into supply up until December 1979 and is now leased to the Mill Meece Pumping Station Preservation Trust. The trust hold steaming days and rally events during the year and is open with free admission to the public most Sundays although the engines will normally be static.



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The first offices of the Staffordshire Potteries Water Undertaking were at No.22 Lamb Street in Hanley although the stay there was relatively short lived as they moved to 37, Albion Street in Hanley during 1858 and remained there until the end of 1975, around 18 months after being taken over by Severn Trent Water Authority in April 1974. After the take-over, the former Staffordshire Potteries Water Board initially remained largely unaltered apart from being renamed North Staffordshire Water Supply Division.

The Offices in Albion Street were quite strange in that from outside, they appeared to be a two storey building but inside there were three floors. This was partially because the building was originally two separate buildings with the white windows forming the original Staffordshire Potteries Water Board building and the building on the corner belonging to the Potteries Savings Bank. Staffordshire Potteries Water Board took over the bank building in 1889.



In the early 1970's, the white fronted upstairs windows in the photograph were the General Office and were on the top floor whereas the three top windows to the right which was the Work Study office were on the middle floor.

The three ground floor windows on the right were the Billing (Rates) Office and inside was something that would not have looked out of place in a Charles Dicken's novel. It had a large continuous sloping desk around the outside and the staff sat on large stools facing the windows with huge rating ledgers on the desk containing details of all the properties served by the company. There was also a wooden phone box in the corner which was the only phone in the office apart from one on the manager's desk which was for his use only. The two white fronted windows next to the Rates Office were the Treasurer's Office and the windows to the left of the front door was the Post Room where a machine known as 'The Burster' that split the half yearly printed water bills and neatly folded them into window envelopes was also located. Inside the entrance was an attractive Minton Hollins mosaic floor panel based on the initials of the original company. The building is Grade 1 listed.

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Around the corner in Bethesda Street was a smaller building that housed mainly administrative staff. There was also a door between the Billing Office and this building where customers could enter to pay their water bills at a counter.



A further office was used by the Company about 100 yards along Bethesda Street which were the old schoolrooms to the Bethesda Methodist Church. And in between the two buildings was a graveyard with lots of old tombstones. The staff were told in the 1970's that the schoolrooms were to be demolished as they were deemed unsafe but they are still standing today. Over in the Bethesda Offices were the Supply and Distribution teams along with the Meter Billing, Finance, Plumbing Inspection and New Connections teams.



The Company's workshops, stores and the garage were sited in Adventure Place which was just up the incline from the Albion Street offices past the Bethesda Chapel off Bagnall Street. The Laboratory was in a terraced house in John Street where all the surrounding properties had been demolished and the land was used as a pay and display public car park.

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The computer department was situated across the main road on two separate floors of a large building called Chichester House which also housed the ABC cinema and a ten-pin bowling alley among many other company's offices and S&H Pink Stamps.



Because of the disparate nature of all these buildings and their locations, the Staffordshire Potteries Water Board decided to purchase a site in Burslem in the north of the city of Stoke-on-Trent to have purpose built offices and workshops on one plot. The foundation stone was laid in 1973 and they were completed during mid-1975. However in the intervening period, the company was taken over by Severn Trent Water Authority and it is the author's understanding that Mr. Michael Upstone from Severn Trent Water Authority was sent, unsuccessfully, to try to get the new building work stopped before they took over the company.

The author (Phil Goodwin) of this brief history joined the Staffordshire Potteries Water Board in September 1971 when the Engineer and Clerk was Mr. Frank Liptrot Ardern and the Deputy Engineer was Mr. John A. Harris. The Treasurer was Mr. William Anderson who had just replaced the long serving Mr A.L. Cheetham. The Deputy Treasurer was Mr. Peter F Calladine.

Phil went for an interview as a Junior Clerk in July 1971 only to be initially rejected but was told to phone the company at the end of August as there would be another similar vacancy. Phil did so and was duly appointed to start work on Monday 6th September 1971 on a starting salary of £510pa. Within two weeks of starting, the company gave its employees a pay rise and Phil's salary was increased to £567pa.

Although the Hanley main offices seemed a bit Dickensian, laughter was abundant when he looks back on those times. A couple of bizarre incidents stand out for Phil. He only worked in the Rates Office for about 6 weeks before being transferred to the Engineer's General Office. But one day in the Rates Office, he answered the phone (in the phone box) one lunch time and on the other end was a dog barking loudly. Well the staff who were having their sandwiches were in hysterics. Suddenly a voice came on to the phone and asked why had I not put Mr Kenneth Clay on the phone as I should have known that the dog only ever spoke to Mr Clay!

The other incident involved the Deputy Manager, Mr. John A Harris. Mr Harris did not really mix with the staff and nobody ever knew what the 'A' in his name stood for. He was bald on top with hair similar to that of Bobby Charlton. Well one day, close to the end of the Water Board days, he came into the General Office wearing a toupee and everyone tried to keep a straight face. After he had left the office, amidst all the laughter someone calmly said that the 'A' for his middle name must stand for Aaron!

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The other thing that sticks out in Phil's memory are some of the procedures that would not be allowed in these modern times. Like Fridays for instance when the wages were bagged up for the manual workforce who were paid weekly in cash. Four staff out of the general office would cross a busy road with a small alarmed bag attached to one of the staff to go to the Co-op bank before they opened to the public at 9:30 and bring back hundreds of pounds in cash to be paid out that day. Later that morning, the supervisors from the distribution depots and workshops would collect the cash after it had been put into pay packets to take back and hand out to their operatives. Then, after lunch, three members of staff from the general office would take the remaining cash out to the pumping stations and the mainlayers located all over the area in three small vans with three passengers, usually the storemen or office juniors, riding 'shotgun'. Amazing really!

Another role which Phil carried out was the matching of goods received notes to invoices and then the authorisation and payment of those invoices. This practice would fail Corporate Governance these days. Good job Bill Gould and Phil Goodwin were honest chaps!

In April 1975, North Staffordshire Water Supply Division merged with Stafford Water Division and Upper Trent Water Reclamation Division to form Severn Trent Water Authority's Upper Trent Division which covered virtually the whole of Staffordshire for water supply, distribution of clean water, waste water treatment and disposal and also river protection. The headquarters of the new division were to be based in Burton-on-Trent and caused quite a lot of resentment amongst the staff at Hanley as Stoke-on-Trent seemed a more logical choice particularly as Burton's water supply was provided by South Staffordshire Waterworks Company.

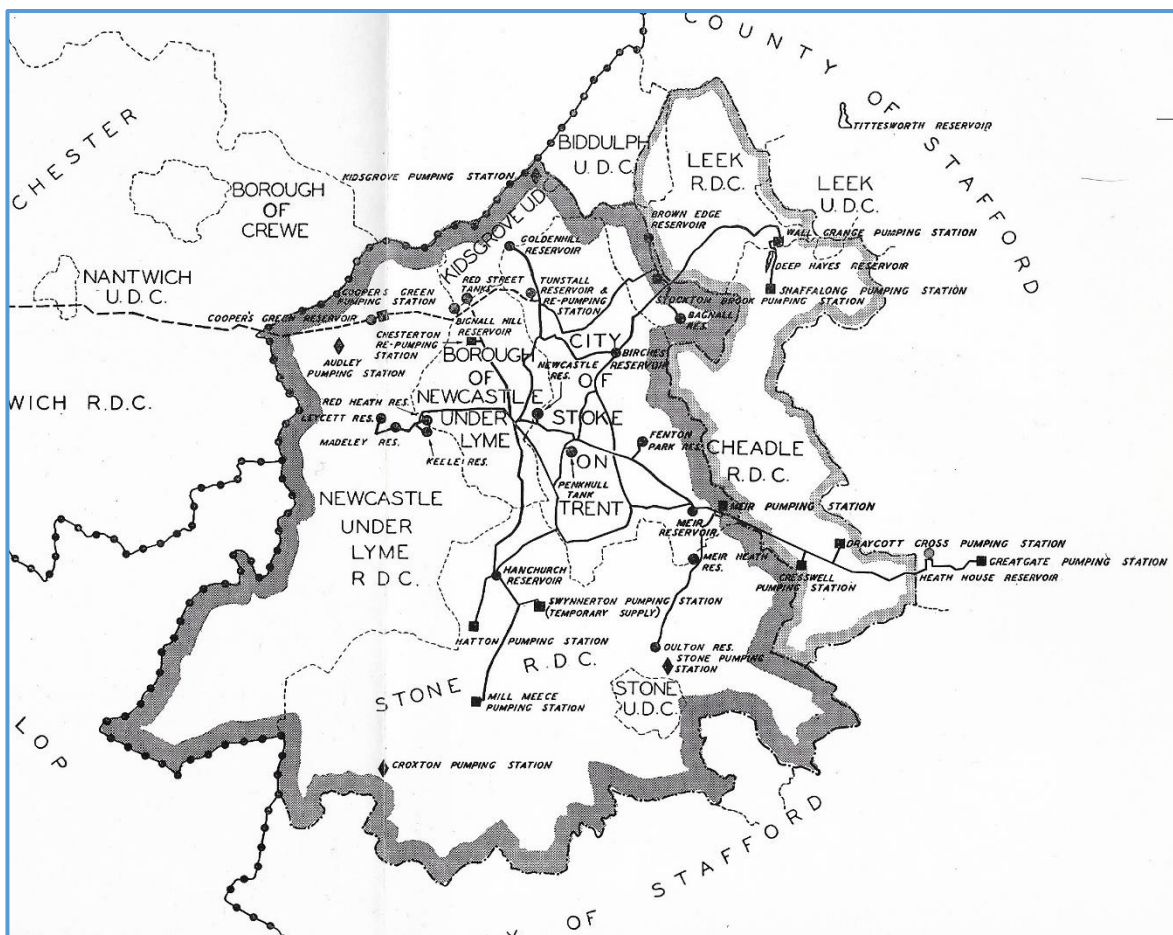
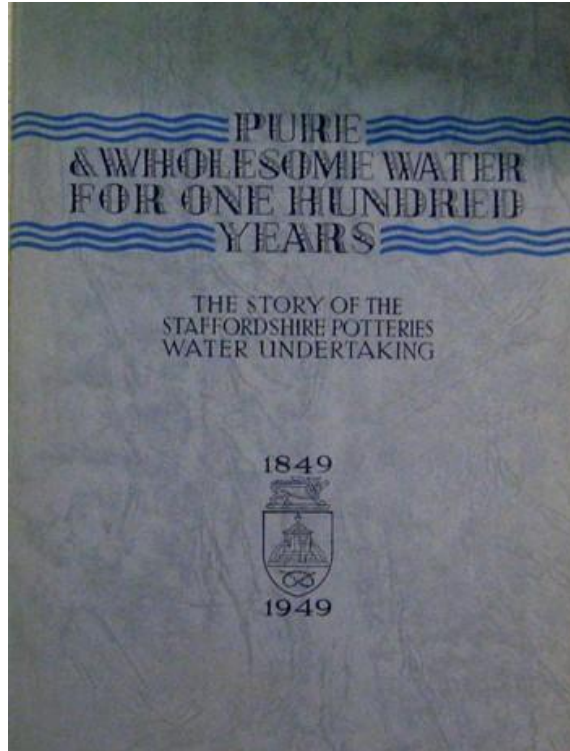
Phil then moved to the new offices in Burslem on their completion in July 1975 and was transferred to Upper Trent Division's headquarters Finance Team at Burton-on-Trent (Trinity Square) offices in 1982. The creation of Northern Division meant a further move to Derby (Raynesway) in 1987 where he was the Derby District Accountant. A short spell as the Stoke District Accountant was followed by a move to Birmingham HQ (2297) in 1990. This was then followed by a move to Coventry (Finham) in 1992 as Coventry and North Warwickshire District Accountant before returning to Birmingham HQ in 1998 and then back to Derby in 2005 prior to taking voluntary redundancy in March 2008. Phil was the last remaining employee of the Staffordshire Potteries Water Board to be employed by Severn Trent Water.

The Burslem Offices closed following the demise of the Districts around 1997 although the Depot is still there and a few office staff are still based there. The large office building is now occupied by United Christian Broadcasters.



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Some of the information contained in this brief history was taken from the publication below. A rare publication of which a full two packets were found in the stationery cupboards prior to the move to Burslem in 1975. Although a few were issued out to the staff, many must have been thrown into the bin. The author mislaid his copy many years ago and has recently purchased another one off e-bay. The booklet also contained a map of the Water Board's area at the time.



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These are the names of the staff that I can recall from Staffordshire Potteries Water Board prior to the April 1974 take over by Severn Trent Water Authority.

STAFFORDSHIRE POTTERIES WATER BOARD STAFF

Engineer and Chief Clerk : Frank Liptrot Ardern

Deputy Engineer : John A. Harris

Company Secretary : Clifford Haywood

Supply & Distribution : Les Beardmore, John Pursglove, Bob Johnson, Jack Stead, Gerard Proctor, Phil Bromage, Walter Johnson, John Gibson, Paul Thompson, Dave Burgess

Supply Works Managers : Ray Walters (Tittesworth), Ken Price (Peckforton), Bill Buckley (Mill Meece), Ray Bagshaw (Hatton), Les Egerton (Cresswell), Mike Adshead (Wall Grange), John Watson (Stone)

Depot Supervisors : George Brayford (Newcastle), Ken Morrey (Longton), Colin Bull (Cheadle), Eric Colclough (Tunstall)

New Works Engineers : George Robertson, Peter Toft, Dennis Duffin, Clive Sherratt, Noel Brown, Alec Abson, Valerie Austin

New Supplies : Tom Harrison, Bill Housley, Peggy Bettaney

Plumbing Inspectors : Tony Bradshaw, Neil Whitby

General Office : Ted Harper, Doug Sylvester, Mike Carr, Gill Daniels

Stock Control : Geoff Davenhall, Gilbert Richards,

Goods Received and Payment of Invoices : Bill Gould, Phil Goodwin

Wages Clerks : Graham Shaw, Ruth Bromley, Jackie Sheldon, Barbara Vernon

Switchboard Operators : Camilla Woolley, Myra Thompson

Work Study Clerks : John Silvester, Ivan Richardson, Neil Barber, Audrey Evans

Transport : Charlie Davies, Sam Pilling, Norman Long, Chris Clay, Les Oakes

Electrical & Mechanical Maintenance : Cyril Thorley, Philip Lovatt

Building Maintenance : Alan Plant, Ken Walklate, Alan Powell, Gary Lymer

Painters : William McGovern, Daniel McGovern

Stores : Les Smallman, Les Barrow, George Wagstaff, Len Brailsford, Alf Hamill

Meter Repairs : Harry Lockett, Tom Wood, Tom Bradbury

Mainlaying Supervisors : Brian Barrow, Ken Bryaon

Fisheries : Tom Calder

Treasurer : William J. Anderson

Deputy Treasurer : Peter F. Calladine

Accounting Team : George Cook, John Cook, John Tinsley, Frank Webb, John Billington, Neil Forester

Unmeasured Billing Team : Peter Rushton, Jack Bailey, Gordon Boulton, Ken Clay, John Window, Ann Beamond, Betty Purcell, Eric Warrilow, Harry Sutton, Bill Smith, Graham Goodwin, David Davies, Joe Curl, Sandra Cashmore, Kath Booth, Pauline Statham, Janice Hogg, Brian Burgess,

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Measured Billing Team : Gilbert Knott, Mike Grainger, Ted Hillman, Joe Dobbs

Cashiers : Susan Lightfoot, Nancy Marshall, May Dale

Salaries and Pensions : Jean Grainger, Geoff Roberts

Secretaries / Typists : Doris Hudson, Val Hibberts, Maureen Ashley, Joan Booth, Colleen Sargeant, Jean Taylor, Cath Tomlinson, Elsie Gibson, Pat Atherden,

Computing : Chris Parker, Ann Austin, Valerie Montgomery, Pat Curl, Christine Stone, Janet Burt

Chemists : Cath Broster, George Smith, Dave Barker