

# Ranmoor Society

March 2006

## News

### Water Supply and Ablutions during the Victorian Period

Based on the Society's February talk about Victorian Bathrooms,  
by Susan Deal

In early Victorian times Sheffield was an insanitary place, although somewhat better than towns like Liverpool or Manchester. Many of the poorer parts of the town were filthy and overcrowded. The average age of death in Sheffield in 1841 was 24 years, and 513 out of every 1000 deaths were of children under five years. The rapidly increasing population at this time led to the speculative building of barely tenable ramshackle houses.

In 1832, Sheffield suffered a cholera epidemic when 402 people died in the warmer months between July and November. People then had no idea that cholera, typhoid and typhus fever were water-borne, many believing that illness came through the air.

The development of Sheffield's public water supply was driven primarily by the needs of industry, rather than those of the population. Families had difficulty obtaining fresh drinking water, and much of the supply was unfit to drink. The free glass of drinking water offered to visitors to the Crystal Palace in 1851 was regarded as a welcome novelty. It was usual for people, children as well as adults, to drink beer rather than water. Indeed, it was the improving supply of water as an alternative to beer that made possible a growing impact of the Temperance Societies.

The earliest of Sheffield's reservoirs, at Redmires and Crookes, were built by a private company in the early 1830s, linked by a 4.5 mile conduit that passed through the Carsick and Ranmoor area. (The remains of this are still visible along Tetney Road. It was in use until 1909.) In spite of regularly increasing capacity, the supply remained intermittent. Partly to ensure that water would run every time a tap was turned on, Sheffield Corporation took over responsibility for the public water supply in 1888.

Back in the 1840s, only one in 12 households received piped water. By 1884, this had increased to one in three; a further one third of houses obtained their water from a tap in the yard; and the rest had to bring it from standpipes elsewhere. Fetching water in pots and pails from the nearest standpipe was generally a job for women and children. For those who could afford it, water could be bought for a halfpenny a pail. Even if you had a piped supply, that was by no means continuous. Water was often available for only two or three hours a day, on

alternate days, excluding Sundays.

At our February meeting, Susan Deal described the unpredictability of the water supply in Victorian times. Personal hygiene was in earlier years treated as relatively unimportant. Whereas bathing occurred perhaps weekly for the upper levels of society, the poorer classes tended not to bathe or wash regularly at all. As domestic water supplies improved, the habit of washing spread, and by the end of the Victorian era even the lower classes were likely to wash on a weekly basis.

The plumbed-in bath did not appear until after 1855. Most people made do with a portable tin bath, often brought into the kitchen where it could be filled directly with hot water from the range or the copper. A variant of this was the hip-bath. In 1914, the average person had never seen a bathroom, and only 12% possessed one.

A bath was often the only item of furniture in early bathrooms. Plumbed-in washbasins began to appear from 1870 onwards, although as most basins were supplied only with cold water they needed merely a single tap. Water-heating arrangements were sometimes ingenious. The gas geyser had been introduced in 1860, but this was notoriously unreliable and occasionally exploded. Occupants of the *General Gordon Gas Bath* (from 1882) needed to pay strict attention to the settings, as this contraption incorporated a gas flame which played on the underside of the cast iron bath to heat its contents (and its occupant).

Water pipes were constructed underneath the new roads laid down in Ranmoor from the 1860s. Houses built then in the expanding suburb usually received their own supply from those pipes.

### Reminder: Subscriptions for 2006

Most members have returned completed membership forms for 2006, which were attached to the last Newsletter.

We hope you wish to remain a member. If so, and you still have to let us know, please send £5 for single membership or £7 for household membership to Shelagh McDonald, our Membership Secretary. Her telephone number is on the reverse side.



## Meetings Programme 2006

7.30 p.m. in the Ranmoor Parish Centre

March 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Place Names of South Yorkshire</b> Ray Battye
April 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>1. From Goole Green to Nether Green</b> Neville Flavell <b>2. Local topics</b> Gerald Eveleigh and Peter Warr
May 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Sheffield Manor Lodge and its Main Characters</b> David Templeman
June 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Thomas Boulsover and Old Sheffield Plate</b> Julia Hatfield
June 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Summer Walk (6.30 p.m.)</b>
July & August	No meetings
Sept. 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Transport in Ranmoor</b> Andrew Swift
October 17 <sup>th</sup>	<b>The Sheffield Flood</b> Malcolm Nunn
October 25 <sup>th</sup>	Visit to Sheffield Local History Library, 6.30 to 8.30 p.m.
November 21 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Totley and The Tunnel (Part 2)</b> Brian Edwards
December	No meeting

### Society Meeting on April 25<sup>th</sup> From Goole Green to Nether Green

Neville Flavell has recently produced an interesting book that traces the roots and history of Hallam Methodist Church from 1756 to the present day. It marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the first Hallam Methodist Society in the days when John Wesley visited Sheffield.

Its birthplace was a farm/alehouse run by William Woodhouse on Fulwood Road (near the current scout hut). Its licensed public room was used for preaching to a group of about a dozen worshippers, although Woodhouse had to agree not to sell drink on the Lord's day or whenever a preacher was speaking. At this time, preaching took place at irregular times on any day of the week, and informing the locals when sermons were due was difficult. So it became the practice for William's wife Sarah to hang a white sheet

from a tree to alert residents of Ranmoor, Fulwood and the Mayfield Valley.

Much other local information can be found in Neville's book, including the history of the Ranmoor Road Wesleyan Chapel from 1783. This was rebuilt in 1870, and demolished in 1963. Copies will be available for sale at our meeting in April, when Neville will describe main developments in the area.

The second part of that meeting will look briefly at the history of Nether Green and the Machon House Estate (later called the Fulwood Park Estate) and at some other topics covered in our Archive.

### Ballard Hall Site

The derelict building behind St John's Church remains an eyesore. As many members know, this was previously a hall of residence for Sheffield Hallam University. Considerable local opposition to the proposal some time ago to build a large number of flats on the site led to the City's rejection of that plan.

A different proposal for the site was submitted to the City Council last March. This was from a second developer, which now owns the site, and included 72 flats spread over six blocks.

That proposal was considered to be incomplete, and additional information was requested. However, that information has not been received, and the file for the application has apparently been closed. No other application has so far been received.

This site is important for Ranmoor, and an attractive development is clearly in all our interests. At present, it is in a very bad state, with obvious damage to existing buildings. As long as the site is safe, the owners are not obliged to do anything with it. Although it is fenced off, access is clearly possible, since many windows have been broken. We'll have to watch it!

### Ranmoor Society Committee 2005

<i>Chairman:</i>	Andrew Swift	268 5158
<i>Secretary:</i>	Gerald Eveleigh	230 1992
<i>Membership Sec:</i>	Shelagh McDonald	230 1048
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Gill Battye	230 1596
<i>Archive Coordinator</i>	Peter Warr	230 9174
<i>Planning Matters:</i>	David Barber	230 4717
<i>General Matters:</i>	Bob Loynes	230 3004
<i>Minutes Secretary:</i>	Reg Cleaver	230 9876