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A Well in Westgate Street, Gloucester

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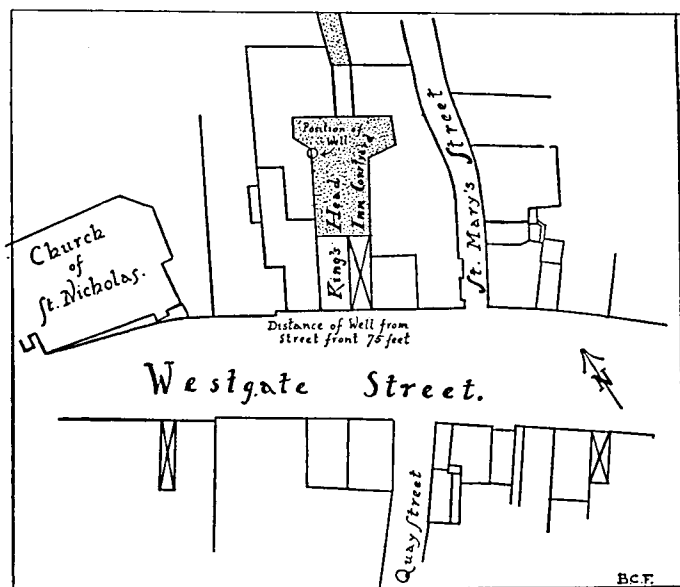
A WELL IN WESTGATE STREET, GLOUCESTER

During demolitions at the former King's Head inn in Westgate street, Gloucester, the top of a well was exposed, which collapsed from the weight of a lorry being accidentally run over it. The discovery of the well was reported to the Acting Curator of Hooper House Museum in July 1944. The inn had formerly been of considerable importance, being of the arch-way and courtyard type, and dating from the late 18th century, though it is probable that an earlier building of the same name stood on the site well before that time, and the final inn retained much of the earlier structure, as the demolitions showed. With the decline of coaching the whole building had gone into decay, from an inn which had given a shelter to Royalty, to a cheap lodging house. As an inn it was sold up in 1865.

The well is situated 75 feet from the present building line on the north side of Westgate street, and is 25 feet from the present east side of the yard, and is approximately 3 feet 6 inches in diameter. Mr Sydney Pitcher has kindly taken a photograph which gives a good idea of the steaning, mostly of a very close-grained blue-grey stone (? Blue Lias), although a few of the stones are oolitic limestone with an occasional piece of red sandstone. The stones were roughly squared, whilst the larger ones were shaped to the curvature of the well. This stone lining finishes some two feet from the present ground level, but on top of it are two courses of modern bricks, apparently added when the well was covered over. This covering had consisted of brickwork laid upon paving slabs resting on timber beams across the top of the well ; these timbers had completely rotted away, so that the weight of the lorry had caused its collapse.

When first examined the water in the well was 8 feet 4 inches below the present ground level, and retained that depth even after ten months. An attempt was made to pump out the water in order to clear the bottom of the

well and examine any of the debris with a view to establishing its date. For this purpose various National Fire Service pumps were employed, and although the well was pumped out on three occasions it rapidly re-filled to its original level, and in spite of a general shortage of water at that time it was estimated that the inflow was several hundred gallons an hour, and this prevented more



than a fraction of the brickwork and rubble from being removed. Thus it was not possible to determine the original depth of the well, but from measurements made by removing a lead suction-pipe on the east side, it is estimated to be from 14 to 15 feet. The lead pipe itself was probably not earlier than the 19th century. Nothing was recovered from the well to give any clue as to its date, but as will be seen from the accompanying plan, the well was immediately under the east wall of the part of the inn on the west side of the courtyard, and must

therefore have pre-dated this wall, which may be of late 18th century date. The top of the well is about 43 feet O.D.

It is understood that several wells have been discovered and filled in, in the past, between this site and St. Nicholas church. Special thanks are due to the N.F.S. and the Corporation Waterworks Department for pumping out the well, and also to the R.E.M.E. authorities for permission to carry out the investigations, and for assistance.

ANALYSIS OF THE WELL WATER

The sample taken was insufficient for an organic or bacteriological examination, and as conditions precluded the possibility of any useful investigation along this line, attention was directed exclusively to the mineral constituents. An examination gave the following figures :—

Calcium carbonate	..	17.18	grains	per	gallon
Calcium sulphate	..	1.19	"	"	"
Magnesium sulphate	..	13.00	"	"	"
Sodium sulphate	..	1.71	"	"	"
Sodium chloride and					
Potassium chloride	..	16.80	"	"	"

This water would not be desirable as a domestic supply on account of its hardness, which, expressed in Clark's degrees is 28.88. Mention may also be made of the somewhat high magnesium content, which is not surprising, as waters of this character, or mineral waters, are to be found in the district, as for example, Gloucester's original Spa (situated lower down in Westgate street), and the Spa in Brunswick road. Waters of very high magnesium content have also been reported from Twigworth and Quedgeley, and it has often been noted that its presence in such quantity curdles milk, thus making a good cup of tea impossible.

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Well in the courtyard of the King's Head Inn, Gloucester, discovered July 1944
ph. Sydney Pitcher, F.R.P.S.