

The Whirly'Ole. Ashbury

I suppose I am the only living person to have explored the Lyde Whirly'Ole. I had always been intrigued by this dark hole and talk of a Cave. In about 1911 I managed to persuade John Page, who was our odd job gardener at the Upper Mill, to take me down the Hole to explore.

I cannot remember how I managed this it was highly dangerous and had to "be kept secret. My family must never know, John Page's job was at stake. However, I somehow managed to 'persuade' my guide and counsellor, collect the necessary candles, matches etc, and get on site without being seen. It may be that as it was one of ray jobs to draw and distribute the Beer ration (every man was given one pint of Home Brew at 11am and 3pm each day). That, and my childish ways enabled me to get favours, probably now called bribery.

The Cave I wished to explore was about 100 yards from the 'Three Posts' towards Drews Hill, on the left under the White Railing, down a steep bank about in line with the second or third Water Cress Bed. Climbing this bank and a drop of about four feet, was the place where the strange gurgling had come from at times. The sound could only be described as Bath Water running out through the plug hole. The whole place was covered in Brambles, there was no sign of a path to the place or it had not been used for a long time, it was reputed to be haunted.

There, cut into the Chalk, without any apparent protection or shoring up, was the entrance to the Tunnel, about four feet six high and three feet wide, it ran straight under the Road, without any obvious supports, under Pound Piece and ending as a blank wall, estimated to be about half way down Millers Hill. I gauged this by the Apple Tree roots appearing through the roof, the Orchard above was ours. A pipe crossed Millers Hill and discharged into a stream running into the Pond.

On the floor of the tunnel was a land drain about four inches in diameter carrying the water. It had been John's job at times to clear out the pipe by lifting each section in turn, they were not jointed, scrape out the sediment, and cut off roots that used to try and get into the pipes and so cause a blockage.

We had to walk astride the pipe, bending almost double to clear the roof where silt had been dumped and built up to about six inches above the top of the pipe on either side making progress slow and rather painful.

The thunder of horses hooves on the road was rather frightening (there were few Cars in those days). I admit I was glad to get out.

John went off to the Rose & Crown and I went back through the Mill to get plenty of flour dust on my clothes to hide up the white mud from the chalk.

This is my first confession, luckily we were never found out.

I have no idea when the tunnel was dug, it was of importance when my Grand-father Henry Pound 1832-1916 ran both Mills, the Upper and Lower (the water was then used twice) later the demands of the Watercress men became too great for a Strict Baptist Preacher to face, it appears he turned the other cheek and lost the water. There were stories of night raids on the Hatch Boards and diverting the water and in dry seasons this was a serious business.

At that time I was too young and too frightened to take accurate measurements, but I formed the impression that the silt I saw must have taken a century or so to build up.

I have often wondered if anybody else was fool enough to try this trip since.

Ernest Pound.

Enfield.

25 June 1974.

Born 30/2/1898