

## THE EARLSDON 'NUISANCE'

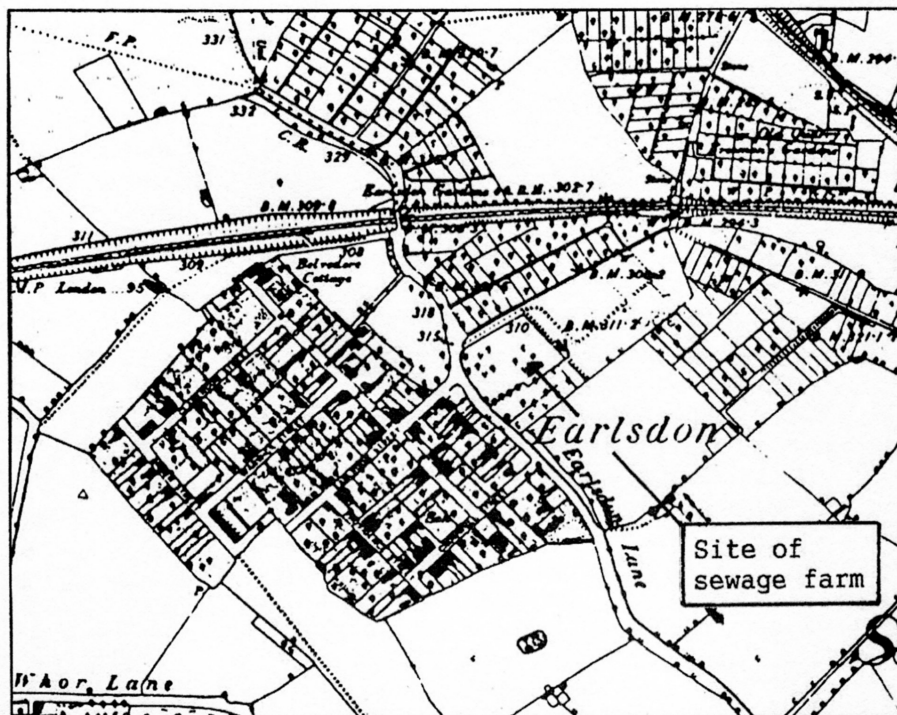
One of the inconveniences of living on the Earlsdon estate during the first 50 years of its existence was its poor sewage system. System? well if you can call the little shed at the bottom of the garden and the weekly collection by the scavengers of the euphemistically named 'night soil' a system, then that was what it was.

The residents of Chapelfields (developed 3 years before Earlsdon in 1849) had the luxury of flush toilets from the start, but then their homes were nearer to the river Sherbourne into which the sewage flowed and - they paid City rates. The water supply to Earlsdon, although from the same source as Chapelfields (the Artesian well at Spon End) had much further to travel and up hill into the bargain. The pressure needed for the meagre tap supply was apt to fail at times; it could never have coped with flush toilets.

Earlsdon did have a drainage system which took away the waste water from the sinks and road surfaces after heavy rain and this was directed down an open ditch to the Butts area and ultimately into the River Sherbourne. Running by the side of the only footpath down to the City, this ditch became notorious as the 'Earlsdon Nuisance'. Residents and visitors from the City using the path complained bitterly again and again about the stench and unsightliness. No mention was made of a possible health hazard - the objections seem to have been made purely on aesthetic grounds.

In the height of the summer, 1874, things came to a head. The stench became unbearable. Two of the leading lights of the Earlsdon community, Mr Walker and Mr Betts attended a meeting of the Rural Sanitary Authority to ask their help in solving the problem. They were told in no uncertain terms that as the residents didn't pay City rates, no way could they expect any assistance from them.

The two gentlemen returned to



Earlsdon, called an open meeting and the decision was made that as something had got to be done, they had no choice but to 'go it alone'. A committee was elected and with help and encouragement from Dr Iliffe (late the Medical Officer of Health for Coventry), plans were made....

By raising a local rate an area of 3.5 acres of land was bought, the area now covered by the shops, flats and houses of the top part of Albany Road with the Gilbert Richards Centre behind them.

Advice and plans were obtained from the Sewage Disposal experts, Messrs Bailey Denton, a builder was appointed to carry out the work and at last by September, 1877 the Earlsdon Sewage farm was installed and operational.

The 'farm' consisted of a series of 3 tanks through which the effluent gradually passed, allowing the silt to settle and the 'purified' liquid syphoned off. This was passed through a conduit and out onto the surface of the surrounding ground, so serving two purposes, getting rid of the sewage and also irrigating the soil. Any surplus, less obnoxious now, ran off into the old ditch.

The surrounding 'farm' land was to be let for horticultural pur-

poses, but as no one seemed anxious to take up the offer, Dr Iliffe himself set the ball rolling by growing a crop of cabbages on it - apparently very successfully. He sold a load of them to the Workhouse for £1 7s 6d, but whether the inmates were told where they had been grown, or whether any were served up in the Iliffe household, is an interesting question.

By the last decade of the century the farm was beginning to have serious problems. The local population was growing fast and the tanks couldn't cope with the extra load, causing overflows and flooding. Even with the provision of larger overflow pipes the problem wasn't completely solved.

But by now its life was drawing to a close anyway. In 1890 Earlsdon was officially linked up with the City, on paper by its Incorporation and on the ground by the building of Albany Road. Now with an improved water supply and proper sewage pipes connected with the City sewers, by the end of the century the Earlsdon 'Nuisance' had become a thing of the past. Although there was some reluctance and a lot of grumbling from a few residents at now having to pay City rates, being able at last to flush the 'loo' must have been a great relief to all.

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