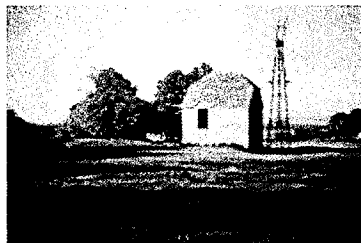


## TALES FROM THE HILLS

(Ashmansworth and Crux Easton)



“This sort of ground is characterised by an astonishing depth that they have to go for the water. At Ashmansworth, they have to go to a depth of more than three hundred feet,” wrote William Cobbett in 1823.

Today you can’t see the well at Ashmansworth; however Crux Easton’s well is open on several days every year, thanks to the efforts of the late Carol O’Shaughnessy, her sister Lynn, and others. They opened the well, repaired the Well House, and restored the wind-pump.

You may, if you dare, peer down the well and gaze at the water 300 feet below. The shaft is five feet wide at the top and five feet wide at the bottom but, because of the astonishing depth, the water at the bottom appears only as a tiny shining disc. The shaft is lit by electric light and is protected by a very sturdy steel grid so you can look down in perfect safety; but anything valuable you drop through the bars you will never see again.

The original builders excavated 200 tons of material from that confined space, all of which had to be lifted carefully to the surface. Any carelessly dropped flint could kill at 30 feet, let alone at 300. There was little room to swing a pickaxe; and how they kept the air fresh or their candles burning, heaven knows. It remains one of the great civil engineering feats in the parish.

The problem with all deep wells, once dug, is the cost of getting the water to the surface. Any Crux Eastoner hauling water up by hand from 300 feet down found that they tired very quickly, so before the wind-pump arrived they used horses. In fact it was this problem which sparked the industrial revolution: it was for pumping water from deep holes like the Cornish tin mines that James Watt invented his famous steam engine.

Watt ranked his different engines by their ‘horsepower’; and it is no surprise that he defined ‘horsepower’ in terms of the energy expended by a horse raising water from a well.

*Agricola*