

Hinton Martell Village Fountain

Hinton Martell is one of the tiny number of English Villages that boast a fountain. Its origins are not well documented but it looks like William Burt, the owner of Witchampton paper mill, installed the fountain around 1870-80. It is suggested that the fountain was an overflow or pressure control mechanism for the water supply that came from a spring on Piper's Hill and fed Burt's house (Biddlecombe) and the other houses in Hinton Martell.



The Fountain

Sir Frederic Treves the Edwardian author wrote a caustic description in his book 'Highways and Byeways in Dorset' *Hinton Martel, an out of the world hamlet of thatched cottages, has a possession which is, as far as I know, unique among the attractions of hamlets. In what is called the street is a circular basin, in the centre of which is such a fountain as may be found in a suburban tea-garden or in front of a gaudy Italian villa. The fountain, of painted metal, tawdry, flimsy, represents a boy standing in one dish while he holds another on his head. No unhappy detail is spared: the ambitious pedestal, the three impossible dolphins, the paltry squirt of water are all there. How this café chantant ornament has found its way into a modest secluded hamlet there is no evidence to show. It would be incongruous even for a Jubilee memorial.*

The first fountain centre-piece described by Treves was a cast-iron effigy of Cupid, supplied by the Coalbrookdale Foundry. The second, a dish supported by dolphins and the present one of Portland stone was unveiled in 1965 by Miss Ann Sidney who was both Miss Poole and Miss World. In the 1965 restoration the surround was rendered, presumably to hide the damaged surface and an electric pump installed.



Above: The original centrepiece from the Coalbrookdale Foundry catalogue.

Coalbrookdale was the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. It was here that Abraham Derby first smelted iron using coke. The company made all sorts of decorative ironwork, including the famous bridge at Ironbridge.

Below: Frost damage is clearly seen on the top fish, the 'mushroom' below, the 'cottage loaf' and the table.

The supporting pillars with their panels are in good condition. Some years back, the corner stones had to be replaced and now these too are starting now to decay.



Sadly the fountain is looking a bit forlorn despite cleanings, repairs and a coat of paint every few years. The centre piece has suffered the weather of many winters, particularly a few years ago when there was a long succession of night frosts followed by sunny days, an ideal recipe for freeze-thaw action that is so destructive to wet stonework. The surround sounds very hollow when hit and there are many cracks in it though these are not structural. Some of the rendering has come away in places.

An exploratory cut made into the surround of the fountain, revealed what is probably the original foundation of soft red brick rendered with a hard grey cement. The later rendering of 1965 has been applied over the original hiding the pleasing lines.



Hinton Martell fountain circa 1910. The iron centrepiece can be clearly seen along with the pleasing lines of the moulded rendering of the surround.



Some of the original rendering visible underneath the rendering applied in 1965.



Possibly the first iron centrepiece was removed for scrap to aid the First World War effort. A replacement iron bowl appears in photos and was removed to make way for the 1965 renovation.



A cut into the surround revealed the original brickwork and rendering.



Young and old for generations have enjoyed the fountain.

A working party has been formed to consider the fountain condition and propose possible actions for the future. Initial quotations have been obtained and the view of the village was sought at the last Annual Parish Meeting in May. Residents expressed a general desire that the centre piece should be replaced with a simple cast-iron bowl and the surround repaired and rendered in the original shape.

A likely way ahead would therefore be to rebuild the surround and have it re-rendered. In the centre the plinth might be lowered and a cast-iron bowl chosen as a replacement for the existing stonework. A new pumping and filtration system would complete the restoration. Draining the fountain is quite a problem, so re-positioning the drain would be beneficial.

If you are interested in supporting the fountain project please fill in the form and the Working Party will inform you when important milestones are reached. Alternatively you can contact me on 01258 840501 or email to chris.mckay@tesco.net

Details of progress will be reported in Village Voices and on my website which is

<http://homepages.tesco.net/chris.mckay/>