

The rain it raineth every day on the just and the unjust Fella, But mainly on the just, because the unjust hath the just's Umbrella

I am quite sure that there are many people who are not at all interested in the history of Goxhill. They will wonder why I so often write about the past and about the enclosure of the village. The reason is quite simply that the past and in particular the enclosure of the village created the place in which we live today.

On the 25th of June the streets of our village and some of our houses were flooded. If more attention had been paid to the infrastructure that was put in to place in earlier times many of the areas that were flooded could have been spared the experience. As a child I was taught that if you do as you like you must be prepared to like what you have done. This seems reasonable but unfortunately the actions of those who do, as they like often have long lasting results which remain long after their demise. Too many people have done things in the past, which present problems in the village today.

Older people talk about a ring of drains all round Goxhill. Unfortunately in modern times this suggests a continuous ring main encircling the village. This was never the case but there were several separate deep drains. These joined together to carry away the water to the Haven and on the West Side of the village to the Budford drain in neighbouring Barrow. These drains were set out in detail and their dimensions laid down in an Act of Parliament in 1775.

One clause in the act is rather interesting to anyone who watched as the water approached or entered his or her front door.

“And we do further order and direct that the Fence Ditches of all and every the allotments herein before made and also the said ancient enclosed lands by and through which the water may be drained from any other allotment or ancient enclosure into any of the public or private

drains aforesaid shall from time to time and at all times herein after be so well and sufficiently cut open scoured and cleaned by the respective proprietors there of so that in no wise to hinder or interrupt the water from passing and draining from any other allotment or ancient enclosure through such fence ditch or ditches into any of the public or private drains aforesaid”

Now this worked very well because the Vestry Committee controlled the village and appointed people to do various jobs. Amongst these were two Dyke Reeves who were responsible for the drains and the flood protection banks by the river. The drains which flowed to the haven had a sluice which allowed the water to flow out at low tide but prevented the tide water from flowing back in. This was called the Clough.

William Sleight was a shepherd and he would go every day to look at the sheep grazing in the marsh. On November 23 1793 the Dyke Reeves paid him five shillings for “Looking after the Clough”. This would be in addition to his farm pay and it would be about six weeks pay for a farm worker. Come back William I think we have a job vacancy.

Since all of these drains were planned and dug out by hand there have been a few changes. The railway arrived and this altered the lay out of several drains. The light railway now disused followed with similar result. The open drain from Lophams to the Chapelfield Road disappeared when the airfield was built. The deep drain at Abbeygarth went when the houses were built. The Fish Dyke once beloved by small boys is no more.

We must not confuse surface water drains with Sewers. Our sewers carry foul water, they do not work and by early morning on the 25th they were overflowing. This was long before the Record Rainfall, which is blamed

for everything, had fallen from the skies. The sewage content of the flood made a bad situation infinitely worse. It does seem strange that whilst there are stringent penalties for discharging sewage into streams rivers and the sea there is no penalty for allowing it to over flow into the streets of our village.

Of course not everyone wants to live beside an open ditch and so in the most desirable of situations the ditch is piped. Whilst affluence must be displayed on the surface economy is the requirement below ground and woefully small pipes are used. This was not always so. When drains close to houses were covered because they were foul, they did an engineering job. A culvert three feet deep was made, the sides lined with brick and the top was a perfect brick arch. This was covered with a thin layer of earth and so is not seen.

These culverts are still working. It is quite remarkable that such a perfect job should be made of something that would be completely hidden.

The Vestry Committee is no more and I am not at all sure who the proprietors of the large public drains are. One thing is however certain and that is that the sufficiently cutting open scouring and cleaning of most of the drains is long overdue.

These Boon payments persisted over many years. In Goxhill in 1775 when the village was enclosed The Corporation of Trinity House was entitled to, “certain out rents distinguished by the name of Sickle Boon Rents”, and so a portion of land was allotted to the corporation in lieu of these rents. This finally extinguished the last tenuous link with medieval bond service in Goxhill. Thirty-two years later the bill brought to Parliament by William Wilberforce was passed into law and slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire.

Maurice Brawn.