



1860 City of Wells Sewerage Plan

In 1860, an extremely detailed two-part plan of the City of Wells was drawn up, based on a new survey of the City. In the historian Tony Scrase's words, it was "*the first comprehensive and accurate representation of the town*". This large-scale plan was accompanied by a 'Survey Book of Reference', which contains details of who owned and lived in each of the properties shown on the plan. It thus provides a fascinating snapshot of the City of Wells in the year 1860.

The reason for the creation of the plan was Wells City Council's Sewerage Scheme, initiated in 1858. This arose from a move to improve public health (especially to respond to cholera epidemics), and in particular from the Local Government (Public Health) Act of 1858. This Act had decentralised health administration and given the administrative powers to local authorities. Wells City Council had adopted the Act, and their Sewerage Scheme was part of their response to it. The Scheme provided new public sewers and drainage, and all people with property on the line of the new sewers could connect their private drains if they wished.

The plan is marked to show the course of the sewers. It also indicates all the features which might require drainage, so it shows privies, wash-houses, pigsties, stables, coach-houses and slaughterhouses. Wells and pumps are shown too, as well as dwelling houses (which are numbered) and features such as inns, hotels, schools, chapels, breweries, and the Union workhouse. So in combination with its accompanying 'Book of Reference', it has immense value as a social history document.

The data in the 'Survey Book of Reference' (WCC/108/3) has been digitised and will be available online on Wells & Mendip Museum's website from June 2017. The book describes the nature of each set of premises; for example, 30 Grove Lane is a 'house, garden, [black]smith's shop, yard, etc.' (owned by W. C. Berryman and occupied by Robert B. Rawlings), and 20 High Street is a house, shop and slaughterhouse (owned by Eliza Taylor and occupied by Charles James). The numbers given for each property are not house numbers, but reference numbers for the purposes of this survey.

The survey and drawings were done by Arthur Whitehead (of Weston-super-Mare), County Surveyor, and the plan is dated 1st September 1860. It is in two parts; one shows the east of the City and one the West, divided at Sadler Street. The scale of the original plans is 1 inch to 160 feet (60 links), and it is drawn on linen-backed paper. Each part is c. 2.2m long.

Plan of the City of Wells (1860), surveyed for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1858

Wells City Council Archives, WCC/108/1 and 108/2

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If you would like further information on the history of Wells and its buildings, you are welcome to contact or visit Wells City Archives (archives@wellsmuseum.org.uk) and Wells & Mendip Museum (admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk).