

Well Pool Questions:

When was the last time the area flooded around the wellpools?

The last time that the gardens were almost flooded was in 2006 whilst James was at the Wookey Flower Show on a Sunday in August he thinks! There was a huge storm and James stayed out for two hours. When he got back the water was pouring out of the cracks in the walls at the Silver Street end of the moat! The diggers on the moat were starting to look unstable as it was being dredged at the time. James opened the sluice gates just in time! It was running out of the well pools and over the lawns down to the moat in the outer gardens! James missed it once more at Christmas ten years ago (the water had just begun to overflow the banks of the wellpools before he spotted what was happening) - but never again!

The water rises very quickly after heavy rainfall and anticipation is required. However, if an overnight met office warning is wrong the moat can often be empty the next morning – if the gates have been opened on the expectation of lots of rain. It can only take 2-3 hours to rise and much longer to reduce. So, no set pattern and not predictable.

About 25 years ago the Head Gardener forgot to open the sluice gates and the flood washed the entire bank away next to the waterfall which meant they had to spend the winter repairing it.

Winter 2018 to autumn 2019 was the longest period of low flow and James opened the gates very little.

2007, autumn 2013 and this autumn 2019 have been the most busy for managing the water flow!

Slow snow melt as you might imagine seems to offer the best replenishment to the longer flow (base flow) as in 2018 which meant even during that long hot summer the flow was surprisingly strong. 2019 was a very slow flow through autumn and summer. The last time it stopped flowing and went smelly and stagnant was in 1995. The Environment Agency manages water flow and silt reduction very well today working more closely with farmers and land owners.

How long do the sluices need to be open for when there is a high water table and heavy rain?

Usually for 48 hours

Were the wellpools ever used for baptisms?

There is no evidence to say yay or nay. That's to not to say that they may have been a site for baptisms in the past. It has long been believed by historians that early Christian baptism was by total immersion in water but also by *affusion* when water was poured on the candidate's head. The practice of immersion continued for many centuries in this country and William Tyndale, an English scholar who became a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation, wrote about immersion still being common practice. One archaeologist, architectural historian and academic – Warwick Rodwell – has suggested the presence of a Romano-British burial chamber very nearby, which may have been Christian. However, a later and convincing analysis by John Blair, Professor of Medieval History and Archaeology, has concluded that the assumed mausoleum was 'an unused damp-proofing cavity'. Whoever is correct, it is certain that a Saxon mortuary chapel was built over this structure. In about 705 A.D., King Ine of Wessex gave permission for a minster church to be founded in Wells. We also believe that the well, known as St Andrew's Well, has long been held to be holy.

Why bother building such a fancy wellhouse?

In its time, this building would have been commonplace. It is a rare example today of a building type that would have been seen in monasteries and towns. Beckington was also a notable builder in Wells – he did nothing by halves so would have wanted any structure in his garden to be aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.