

# History Trail

## Point 15 – Steam Pipes & Heating System

The original boiler house serving Hill End Hospital was situated behind the entrance building. A 'dragon of a system', it was eventually decided to build a 'new' boiler house in the area between the Woodland Garden and the Commemorative Garden by the Village Green. After the demise of the old heating system at Hill End in 1974, steam was fed through large pipes going under Highfield Lane from the Cell Barnes boilers. A public footpath led diagonally across all these fields but was diverted. These pipes were finally removed in 2005.



Original Hill End Water Tower with boilers underneath  
(photo courtesy of MoSTA)



Water Tower during demolition of Hill End hospital (Courtesy of Jim Whittamore)

In 1974, when Hill End hospital still had 487 beds, its boilers reached the end of their life and were shut down. To provide heating and hot water the boilers at Cell Barnes hospital were enlarged to enable them to provide steam via an over - and underground pipeline to Hill End. The Hill End boiler house was situated in the area between the Woodland Garden and the Commemorative Garden. Water from the hospital was pumped up

from its own deep well which was situated on the left hand side corner of Princess Diana Drive as you exit into Hill End Lane.

### **Taken from the History of Hill End Hospital, St Albans 1899-1995 by Brian Anderson**

During 1921 the Hospital bore-hole pumps worked an average of 70 hours a week and in the course of a year pumped 16,249,500 gallons of water. Trouble was experienced with furring up of the pipes carrying hot water so the Committee accepted a proposal from United Water Softeners Ltd to soften the water by the lime-soda system. In 1927 the Committee decided that a new bore-hole was needed, together with a new water-tower. The minutes do not give the reason but probably the existing bore hole could not meet the demand. The new bore, pump house and tower were situated on the northern boundary of the estate near the railway station.



Taken in football field with pipes visible in background (photo courtesy of M. Collins, early 1990's)

“At the beginning coal came in for the boilers off the railway line. Coal always came from Haunchwood Colliery. Boilers were designed only for Haunchwood nuts and boy did it burn! Only 3 boilers of the like in the country”. (HE Building Manager)

“Dreadful boilers. Trage system – only 3 boiler houses in this country which required an Act of Parliament to enable them to function”. (HE Estates Manager)

“The boiler cavern underground was all fire bricks 9” thick built in a dome. To protect the bricks they had to render to coat the bricks and I had to order raw asbestos which was mixed with lime and cement with no protection and coat bricks. It went on for years, we had to coat every 9 months – each boiler in rotation.

After a few years, when there was a panic about asbestos, work stopped and we had to use another material - fire clay and after that all the men had to be x-rayed every 6 months for chest complaints”. (HE Building Manager)

A tunnel under the road and came out by the cricket field? “It was not a tunnel but a continuation of the steam pipes (corridor). There was a roof but not a long tunnel – about 10’ wide. Each side of tunnel there was a store door”. (HE Building Manager)

“The boilers need renewing but not by pumping steam from Cell Barnes! One new, modernish would have done the job”. (HE Senior Staff)

“The Village Green Boiler House – the one near the cricket ground - was an absolute disaster. The authorities put in a small boiler house at Cell Barnes, then pumped steam half a mile. Problems!”. (HE Building Manager)

“In 1969/70 they developed Cell Barnes boiler houses to pipe steam across and underneath the road. Odd because Hill End had water tower and water pumping station and we used to pump water to Cell Barnes who converted it into steam to Hill End”! (HE Building Manager)



## END FOR HOSPITAL BOILERS

THE FOUR steaming giants in the boiler-room at Hill End Hospital, St Albans, have hissed their last hiss.

After heating the 23-ward hospital for 40 years, the quartet of ancient boilers have been made redundant.

Progress has meant the monsters have munched through their last ton of coal. From now on, Hill End will receive its steam via half-a-mile of tubing from two new boilers at Cell Barnes Hospital.

There to see the shutting-down ceremony last week were the chairman of the Mid-Herts Group Hospital Management Committee, Mr Douglas Sanders; the group engineer, Mr Gerald Greenwood, and two stokers who have been steamed up about their job for 27 years.

The pair—Mr John Rosling, of Camp Road, St Albans, and Mr Alfred Adams, of Lemsford Road, St Albans (above) have been given other jobs.

Press Cutting 1974?