

THE CLERKS' WELL.

NOTES ON THE ANCIENT WELL AND THE ADJACENT
RETAINING WALL OF THE BENEDICTINE NUNNERY
OF ST. MARY, CLERKENWELL:

THE PARISH CLERKS AND THE PLAYS THEY PLAYED AT
CLERKS' WELL:

FAGGE'S WELL AND FACKESWELL BROOK, COW CROSS,
SMITHFIELD.

Read to the Society at Bishopsgate Institute, November 5th, 1924

BY

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A RELIC of very great interest to all lovers of old London has been brought to light by the discovery of the Clerks' Well, in the course of the excavations for the rebuilding of Nos. 14 and 16 Farringdon Road (formerly Nos. 1 and 2 Ray Street).

Fitzstephen, in his preface to the life of Thomas à Becket, writing in 1174 of the "Most Noble City of London," says:—

"There are also about London, on the north side, excellent suburban springs, with sweet, wholesome and clear water that flows rippling over the bright stones; among which Holy Well, Clerkenwell and Saint Clement's are held to be of most note; these are frequented by greater numbers, and visited more by scholars and youth of the City when they go out for fresh air on summer evenings. It is a good city indeed when it has a good master."

Stow (b. 1525, d. 1605) in his "Survey of London," 1603, writing of Clerks' Well describes it as being:—

"curbed about square with hard stone, not far from the west end of Clerkenwell Church, but close without the wall that incloseth it. The said church took the name of the well, and the well took the name of the parish clerks, who of old time were accustomed there yearly to assemble and to play some large history of Holy Scripture."

In the pictorial map attributed to Agas (c. 1560-1570), a portion of which is shown here, the spring is seen issuing

from the west wall of the Nunnery of St. Mary, adjoining which is a rectangular enclosure. This enclosure is presumably the structure which Stow saw when he described the well as being "curbed about square with hard stone."

In Agas's map will be seen in the distance the hills of Hampstead and Highgate. Rain falling on these hills flows down through the sand and gravel on top of the London Clay and, formerly, found vent in many places in North London, as at Sadlers' Wells, Bagnigge Wells, the Old London Spa, Skinners' Well and Clerks' Well, whence it found its way into the Fleet Ditch and so into the Thames at Blackfriars.

There can scarcely be a doubt that the well accidentally discovered by a workman is the well referred to both by Fitzstephen and Stow. The words 'Site of Clerks' Well' are printed on the Ordnance Survey of 1894, near the place where the Well has been found, but in Old English lettering that usually denotes lost objects of antiquity.

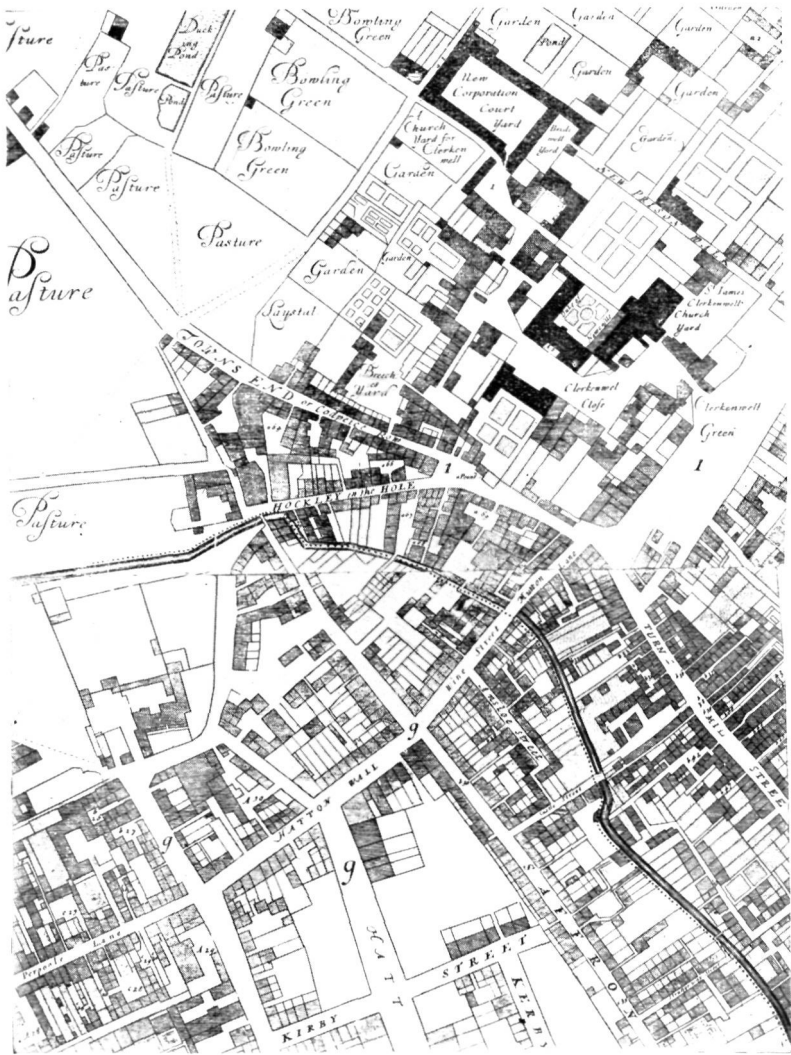
The well has been referred to by many writers since the time of Stow, notably by John Strype, 1720; Storer and Cromwell, 1828; and William Pinks, 1863.

The following extract is taken from Pinks' "History of Clerkenwell," 1863-5, p. 165:—

THE CLERKS' WELL.

"In the year 1673 a donation of this spring and the plot of ground in which it was situated, was made by James, Earl of Northampton, then lord of the manor, for the use of the poor of the parish of St. James', but the vestry thought fit to lease the spring for the benefit of the poor to a brewer of the parish, for a period of twenty-one years, subject to a rent of forty shillings per annum.."

"Though the spring was leased to John Crosse (who was residing in Hockley-in-the-Hole) to whose premises it was contiguous, it does not appear that the inhabitants of the parish were precluded from the use of the water, which they derived from the fountain head by means of a conduit, the overflowings of the spring being collected into a suitable receptacle—the conduit head—at or about the place where the Pump in Ray Street now stands."



2.

OGILBY'S MAP, 1677.

Hockley-in-the-Hole was the former name of the Western portion of Ray Street. The Brewery premises were doubtless those purchased by the parish in 1755 for a paupers' burial ground, and were situate on the west side of Ray Street a little farther north than the watch-house, opposite the Pound, and marked "A. 69" on Ogilby's Map, 1677 (see p. 69). The words "fountain head" are used as being synonymous with the word "spring." The "suitable receptacle" which Pinks describes as the "conduit head" was presumably the circular well, which may have been entirely constructed at this time, or, if it had existed previously as a sunk well in the floor of the rectangular chamber, was apparently raised to a higher level.

In 1675 the Vestry ordered that the Clerkenwell Conduit should be locked up at 9 o'clock at night.

Towards the expiration of the brewer's lease, in 1695, the supply of water seems to have failed for we read that

"On the 27th April, 1694-5, the vestry deputed Colonel Bedford and Mr. Howard to 'look into the cause of turning the watercourse that heretofore went from the fountain head to the place called Clerkenwell, *alias* Clerks' Well.'" The report of this commission, to which two other persons were added is *not to be found*."

"On the 13th April, 1714, the vestry 'ordered and agreed that the Pump and other appurtenances thereunto which was lately set up upon Clerkenwell Green, the charges of setting up the same shall be paid and discharged by Mr. George Dawes, the late churchwarden and allowed in his accounts.'"

From the preceding extract, together with Strype's notes which follow, it would appear that the pump referred to was not erected over the Clerks' Well, but at some position at the bottom of the Green where water could easily be found, and that the 'Old Well of Clerkenwell' was so dilapidated and out of order that it was practically useless.

The chief cause of the trouble would appear to be the diversion of the water from the spring to the brewery premises of John Crosse.

Strype, writing in 1720, says:—

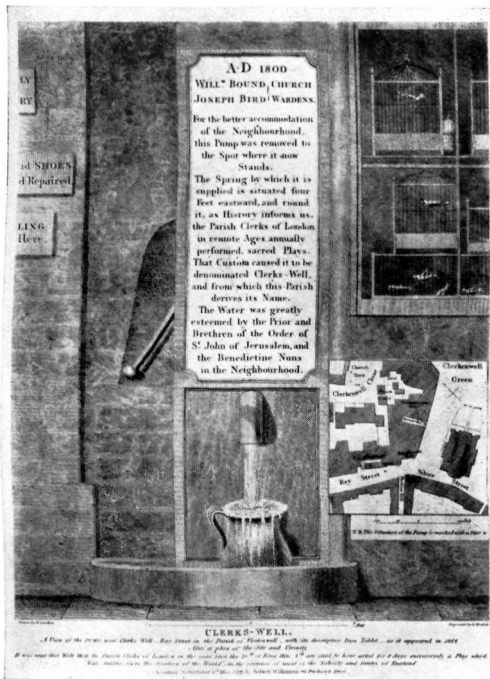
“ The Old Well of Clerkenwell, and from whence the Parish had its name, is still known among the inhabitants. It is on the right hand of a lane that leads from Clerkenwell to Hockley-in-the-Hole, in a bottom. One Mr. Crosse, a brewer, hath this well enclosed, but the water runs from him into the said place. It is enclosed with a high wall which was formerly built to bound in Clerkenwell Close. The present well being also enclosed with another wall from the street. The way to it is through a little house, which was the Watch-house, you go down a good many steps to it. The well had formerly Iron-work and Brass Cocks, which are now cut off. The water spins through the old wall. I was there and tasted the water and found it excellently clear, sweet and well tasted. The Parish is much displeased (as some of them told me) that it is thus gone to decay, and think to make some complaint at a commission for Charitable Uses, hoping by that means to recover it to common use again, the water being highly esteemed thereabouts and many from these parts send for it.”

Strype's notes seem to suggest that No 16 Farringdon Road (No. 2 Ray Street), the site of the well, had also been used as a watch-house at some former time.

Following a long period of neglect, some attempt seems to have been made to restore the well, as will be seen from the following entry in the “ London Gazette ” of 1765:—

“ As a carpenter was going to repair a well belonging to the parish of St. James, Clerkenwell, at the bottom of the Green, which had not been used for a long time, he found to his great surprise the water reddish and extremely hot, and on further examination discovered a large drain made into the well, through which the water flowed a considerable way from a distillery erected in an old house in the neighbourhood, and so contrived that one man might do the business of many, and that very privately, by conveying the smoke into several different chimneys, and letting the waste water into the well already spoken of.”

The next we hear about the well is that in 1800 the pump was brought forward to the face of the building “ for the better accommodation of the neighbourhood ” (vide the Churchwardens' tablet fixed to St. James' Church, p. 79).



4. From Wilkinson's *Londina Illustrata*, 1825, showing pump and iron tablet at No. 2 Ray Street.



RAY STREET, SHOWING THE SITE OF THE OLD CLERKS' WELL AND ST. MARY'S CONVENT, AND THE TOWER OF THE PRESENT CHURCH OF ST. JAMES.

3.

From Pinks' "History of Clerkenwell," 1863-5.

We learn from Cromwell, writing in 1828, that

“ Though the water is now ‘ recovered to common use ’ there is reason to believe that the causes of the ‘ decay ’ are rather increased than removed; there is some apparent obstruction at the fountain head, as at present it cannot be said so much to ‘ spin through the old wall ’ but rather to make its way with great slowness and difficulty. The spring is approached from its receptacle by steps, over which is a brick arch, erected no doubt, at the well’s restoration since the time of Strype.”

Subsequently the well appears to have become hopelessly polluted, and by order of the authorities, was finally closed, and presumably covered over with rubbish in 1857. With the merging of Ray Street in Farringdon Road, its existence was forgotten, and indeed it was assumed to have been destroyed.

Two distinct objects have been discovered, viz., (a) a circular brick well of the usual type, about four feet in diameter, and (b) a rectangular brick and stone chamber about 12 feet long by seven feet wide.

The exact position of the well will, perhaps, be best understood by referring to the old print reproduced from Pinks’ History of Clerkenwell, 1863-5. The drawing appears to have been made between the years 1855 and 1865, for that is the date of the ladies’ dresses shown in the picture. Probably, for reasons stated below, the date would not be later than 1860.

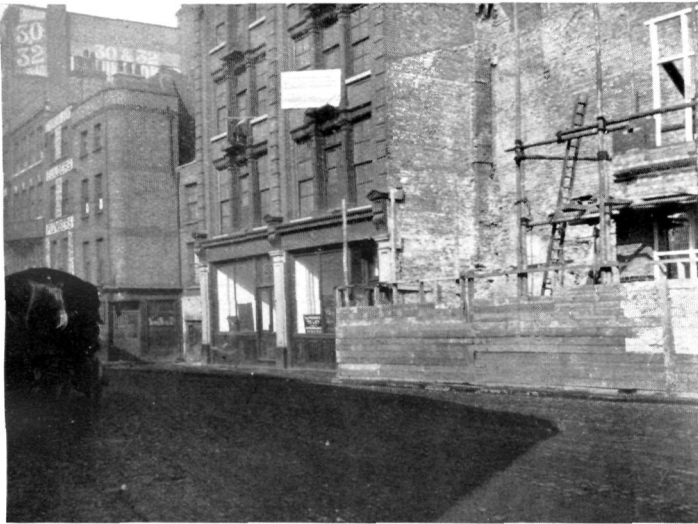
It will be seen from the picture that, although the Farringdon Road Improvement Scheme had been completed, the Metropolitan Railway, which runs in a cutting where the land is shown fenced in, had not been commenced; this section of the work (Bishop’s Road to Farringdon Street) was carried out in the years 1860, 1861 and 1862, and opened for traffic on the 9th January, 1863.

The building at the corner of Clerkenwell Green and Ray Street formerly the “ Fox and French Horn,” P.H., is numbered in Clerkenwell Green (No. 29) and need not be further considered. The next building to the left, having four

windows over a double shop, is now known as No. 14 Farringdon Road (formerly No. 1 Ray Street) next to this is a low shop without any rooms over. This is the "bird shop," No. 2 Ray Street (as illustrated in Wilkinson's "Londina Illustrata, 1825), known in recent years, after having been heightened or rebuilt, as No. 16 Farringdon Road. At the extreme left of this shop, and on the face next the street, was formerly the pump bearing the tablet to which reference will be made later on. It is in the back angle of this shop, behind the pump, that the well has been discovered. The blank wall shown in shadow above the roof of No. 16 is the retaining wall of the Nunnery. See plan p. 80.

It should be noted that to the right of No. 14, which like No. 16 and the other buildings following, is very shallow, there are steps leading up behind No. 14 to a paved Court, known as Fox Court, some 12 feet six inches above the level of the street. This Court formerly gave access to some small buildings, shown in the picture. To the left of No. 16 is a building with two semi-circular arches on the ground storey and two ordinary windows in the storey above, with the name "Wilcox." This building is No. 18 Farringdon Road, and, presumably, the Watch-house erected in 1794. To the left of the watch-house is a building with a segmental arch over some wide gates, with an advertisement above—"Gardner's Porter." This is No. 20 Farringdon Road.

These last two buildings, Nos. 18 and 20 were rebuilt in 1894, and are shown in photograph No. 5. To the left of No. 20, just visible in the photograph, and shown fully in photograph No. 6 is a small building, some six or seven feet back from the general line, known as No. 22 Farringdon Road. This building consists of some very old vaults on the ground storey, extending back to Clerkenwell Close. Between this building and No. 20 there is a space of about three feet, with a flight of steps which formerly led up to a Court (Ray Street Place) giving access to the backs of houses in Clerkenwell Close.



5. Nos. 14 and 16 FARRINGTON ROAD, in course of rebuilding.



6. STEPS FORMERLY LEADING TO RAY STREET PLACE.



7. THE WELL AS DISCOVERED. Photo taken 25th Jan., 1924.



8. INTERIOR OF WELL.

The well was discovered on the 18th January, 1924, in the course of excavating the ground under the northern portion of No. 16 for the purpose of forming a basement storey. What was found at that time is seen in photographs Nos. 7, 8, which were taken on the 25th January. Under the wood and stone floor was found brick rubbish and earth with pieces of chalk and ragstone, below which, at a depth of two feet nine inches, was the circular well, covered with thick elm boards, resting on a beam, all badly decayed. The well was 13 feet six inches deep below the street footway and was half full of water.

Further excavations disclosed the construction of the well, as seen in photograph No. 9 taken on the 1st February. The brickwork was 14 inches thick and built in a very strong mortar, made apparently with hydraulic lime, the inside and outside of the brickwork being rendered with the same material, and on the outside, in addition, was a coating of puddled clay. On the top of the 14 inch brickwork two courses of bricks, nine inches thick, had been laid, one course flat and one on edge, with scarcely any mortar in the joints. These two courses had obviously been added at the time the well was covered over.

There is scarcely any evidence to determine the date of the well, but there is nothing in the appearance of the brickwork to preclude the idea that it was constructed at any time during the 17th or 18th century. The excavations also revealed on the north side of the well some walling, forming part of the well chamber, constructed of thin red bricks obviously of Tudor origin, with seven recesses therein, in which apparently wood joists had been inserted to carry a windlass or pump over the well. The seven recesses in the brickwork had not been cut in an existing wall but had been formed, as seen, when the wall was built. Whatever their use may have been they must be attributed to Tudor times.

On the East side of the well was also disclosed some Tudor brickwork, as seen in photographs Nos. 9, 10, forming the

facing of an old rubble wall, built of chalk and flint, at least three feet thick. This wall is the retaining wall of the Nunnery of St. Mary and formed the back wall of the well chamber. In photograph No. 10 will be seen a recess in the upper part of this wall, which extends right through the wall, and seems to suggest that the Nuns had access to the well from within the Nunnery. The bottom of the recess is about two feet above the present level of the street pavement. It was probably filled in after the suppression of the Nunnery in 1539.¹ The chalk and rubble are exposed to view just below the recess. Both the brickwork and the rubble had been broken away in many places when the adjoining premises were rebuilt in the year 1894. The brick and concrete underpinning work carried out at this time, intermingled with the Tudor brickwork and stone work create a patchwork appearance in the wall, but it speaks well for the old work that so much of it was found fit to remain, and is still being retained in the new buildings. Prior to the year 1894 there is little doubt that the wall extended farther north, along the back of the old watch-house, as far as the steps leading up to Ray Street Place.

The wall rises to a height of 12 feet six inches above the level of the street pavement, i.e., to the level of the two

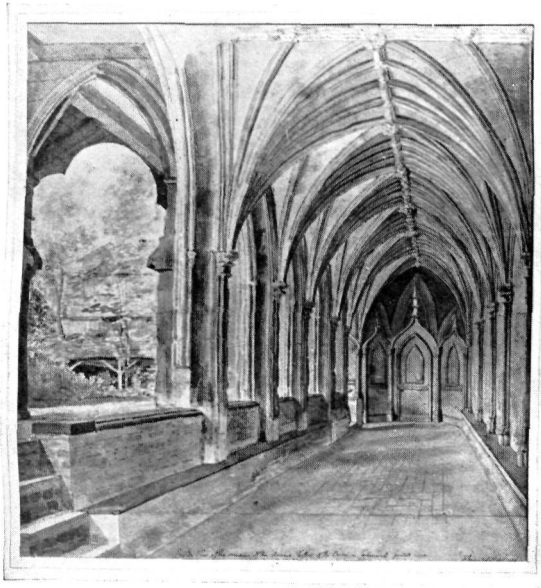
¹ The writer is indebted to Mr. H. W. Fincham (Knight of Grace and Librarian of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem) for the following notes on the Nunnery:—About the year 1140 Jordan de Briset gave in alms for the good of his own soul and that of Muriel his wife and the souls of his parents, brethren and friends, living and dead, to one Robert a priest, his chaplain, fourteen acres of land in the field—'juxta fontem Clericorum'—free of all encumbrances, thereon to build a house of religious persons to the honour of God and the Assumption of Our Lady, for nuns of the Benedictine Order. With regard to the apparent change in the dedication, it would appear that in the Chapel of the Nunnery there was an altar dedicated to St. James, which one assumes was for the use of the laity, the High Altar in the Sanctuary being used by the Nuns. After the suppression of the Nunnery the Chapel became the Parish Church of St. James. In later times the site of the Nunnery came into the possession of the Duke of Newcastle, who erected a large mansion thereon, which is shown on Ogilby's map of 1677, the Duke's garden appearing to have been formed on the Cloister Garth of the Nunnery. The South Walk of the Cloisters is shown on the map by hatched lines between the Church and the garden, next the word 'Newcastle,' and was in existence until the rebuilding of the Church in 1788, as will be seen by the water colour drawing made by J. Sanders in 1786.



9. THE WELL AND WELL CHAMBER.
Partly uncovered



10. THE NUNNERY WALL, SHOWING RECESS.



SOUTH CLOISTER WALK, ST. MARY'S NUNNERY.
From Water Colour Drawing made by J. SANDERS in 1785.
See Footnote p. 74.



11. NORTH WALL OF WELL CHAMBER, SHOWING ROUNDED ANGLE.



12. N. END OF WELL CHAMBER, WITH PIPE FROM CIRCULAR WELL.

Courts approached by the flights of steps to which reference has previously been made. The subsoil of the Courts and the buildings abutting thereon was held up by the rubble wall. The wall, therefore, is what is technically known as a retaining wall.

Continued excavations brought to light further interesting features. These are shown in photographs Nos. 11, 12, which were taken on the 13th February. In No. 11, the well is seen covered over with boards to facilitate the removal of the excavated rubbish. Just above the boards will be noticed the first of the seven recesses shown in an earlier picture. To the left of these, the Tudor brickwork continues for a length of three feet one inch, and finishes with a rounded angle, which extends downwards some three feet below the level of the present pavement (seen at the top of photograph on the left hand side, above the timber strutting). It would appear, therefore, that the level of the footway in Tudor times was some three or four feet lower than at present. Farther to the left will be seen the remains of the front wall of the old building just demolished. Below the Tudor brickwork will be seen some wrought stonework. The photograph also shows the remains of another wall, built also with Tudor brickwork, and similar wrought stonework, which formed the front of the well chamber.

The stone walling extends downwards at least five or six feet, as shown in photograph No. 12. The bottom of the wall has not been reached, being below the level of the basement required for the new building. In photograph No. 12 will be seen the end of the pipe coming from the well, and formerly connected with the pump. It also shows a small hole in the stonework about one inch in diameter. The hole goes right through the stonework and contains a lead pipe. There is a similar hole close by without a pipe, and a little to the right of these a metal rod with a knob was found projecting from the wall. These may well be the remains of the "Ironwork and Brass cocks" referred to by Strype.

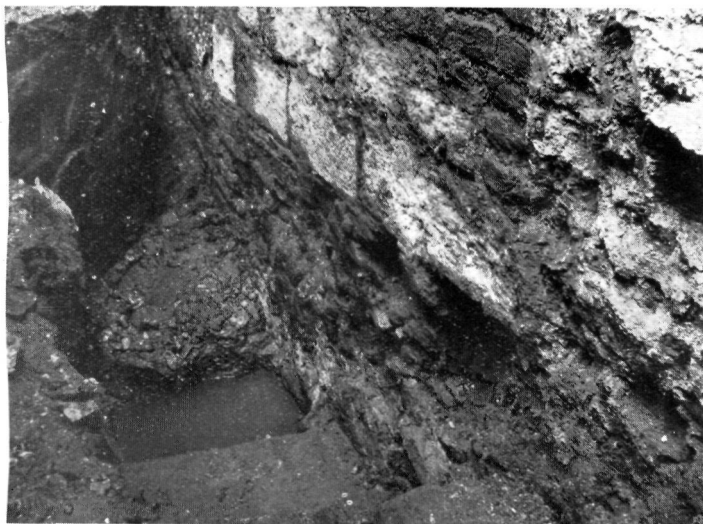
Wrought stonework was also exposed in the lower part of the East wall, seen in photograph No. 13, but there were only two courses, one foot six inches in height, instead of seven courses as in the North wall.

There would seem to be little doubt that these three walls are the remains of what Stow saw when he speaks of the well as being 'curbed about square with hard stone.' Whether or not a circular well of the ordinary form, existed in Stow's time is open to doubt. He makes no mention of it. There may, however, have been a circular well below the floor of the rectangular chamber; some colour is given to this idea by the fact that the seven recesses in the North wall are of Tudor origin, and as they suggest the existence of a staging with either a pump or windlass to draw water, the existence of such a well at that time might be inferred.

Further excavations against the East wall brought to light evidence of great interest and importance. Photograph No. 13 taken on the 21st February, shows the level at which the water stands in the subsoil at the present day, viz., eight feet below the level of the street pavement. To the right in this picture will be seen a large stone projecting from the wall. This forms part of a series of steps formerly leading down to the floor of the rectangular chamber. This stone can also be seen in Photograph No. 14 which was taken on the 5th March, after the water had been partly removed. In this photograph will also be seen another step just above the water, and in the wall on the right a slight recess where an intermediate step formerly existed. These stones have been worn quite smooth and are somewhat rounded on the edge. Below the higher of the two steps (barely visible under the water in photograph No. 13) are the remains of a wall in Tudor brickwork, running at right angles to the East wall. This wall is distant some 12 feet from the North wall, and apparently formed the South enclosing wall of the chamber. No other portions of this wall were existing at the time the building was pulled down, but standing partly on the Tudor



13. E. WALL, SHOWING REMAINS OF STEP.



14. E. WALL, SHOWING STEPS AFTER REMOVAL OF WATER



15. GENERAL VIEW OF WELL, WELL CHAMBER AND
RETAINING WALL.

brickwork was a comparatively modern wall nine inches thick. To the South of this nine-inch wall, and at a distance of some six feet therefrom was another wall which formed the party wall between Nos. 14 and 16. The space between these two walls had been used as a lavatory and coal cellar. Nothing of interest was found therein.

The total length of the basement from the North wall of the rectangular chamber to the party wall would be about 19 feet and the width about nine feet.

At the South-West corner of the rectangular chamber was some Tudor walling projecting one foot nine inches from the West wall to which it was bonded, and projecting some three feet one inch from the modern South wall. This brickwork inclined at an angle with the South wall beyond which it extended some five feet, gradually diminishing in thickness. The position of this brickwork will be seen by reference to the plan of the well and chamber (p. 80). In the centre of this mass of brickwork were found some pieces of ragstone and also pieces of cream coloured stone.

In the lower part of the front wall immediately abutting on this projecting brickwork, a wrought iron grating was found about 10 inches square, built into the brickwork with lugs. (See p. 78). Extending from this grating and running in a South-Westerly direction was a culvert or drain, the bottom of which was at a level of about ten feet below the pavement. This culvert was 12 inches in width internally and built with Tudor bricks, with a semi-circular top. Its direction was down the hill towards Mutton Lane and the Fleet Ditch. It was discovered in digging the trench for the foundations of the front wall of the new warehouse. A few pieces of plain red paving tiles were found, about $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick, but the general excavations have not been carried deep enough to ascertain if a paved floor still exists. Two other items should be noted, one of which may possibly be of some importance. In the South-West angle of the chamber a square brick shaft, about eight inches wide inside, had been erected

probably when the chamber was filled in with rubbish. The object of this shaft was not apparent. The brickwork was not bonded to the Tudor wall and was obviously of a much later date. The second point of interest is in reference to the East wall of the chamber. In photograph No. 15, almost in line with the workman's pickaxe, will be seen a slight projection in the Tudor brickwork. This is formed of pieces of brick bedded in portland cement, inserted at the time when the adjoining warehouse (No. 18) was rebuilt, and forms the stopping of a hole in the wall which may have existed for an indefinite period or may have been made by the contractor to test the thickness of the wall. It is five feet away from the North wall of the chamber, and some five feet six inches below the present level of the footway. It is in close proximity to the place, lower down in the same wall, where water still percolates and where, in Agas's map, a stream of water is seen flowing from the Nunnery wall into an oblong receptacle.

The circular well has been reduced in height since the earlier photographs were taken.

The discoverer of the well (William Barrett) is appropriately seen in the picture, standing on the accumulated rubbish in the well.

On the well being completely emptied at a later date a small lead-lined inlet about six inches high by three inches wide was found at a height of about one foot eight inches above the bottom of the well, and almost vertically under the pipe leading up to the pump. It came from the direction of the North-West angle of the well chamber, but below the floor.

The foregoing descriptive notes have been made as full as possible in order that, with the aid of the photographs and maps, the story of the well may be made clear. The writer fears, however, that there are still many points in the works of accepted authorities who have written on the subject, which cause doubt and perplexity, and which are incapable



17. 1.—THE PIPE SEEN IN INTERIOR OF WELL.
2.—THE GRATING FROM CULVERT. SEE PLAN.



18. THE CHURCHWARDENS' TABLET. A.D. 1800.
FIXED ON W. WALL OF St. JAMES'S CHURCH.

of wholly satisfactory explanation. Particularly is this the case in respect of the suggestion, supported by some presumably authentic evidence, that the well was supplied with water from a spring about 25 feet away on the northern or remote side of the North enclosing wall of the rectangular well chamber.

Reference should be made to the cast iron tablet fixed to the West wall of St. James' Church, shown in photograph No. 18, the inscription on which reads as follows:—

A.D. 1800.	William Bound	}	Churchwardens.
	Joseph Bird		

“ For the better accommodation of the neighbourhood this pump was removed to the spot where it now stands. The spring by which it was supplied is situate four feet eastward, and round it, as History informs us, the Parish Clerks of London in remote Ages annually performed sacred Plays. That custom caused it to be denominated Clerkes' Well, and from which this Parish derived its name. The water was greatly esteemed by the Prior and Brethren of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and the Benedictine Nuns of the Neighbourhood.”

Here is the nozzle of the pump and below the following words on an added tablet.

“ This Tablet which was formerly fixed on the site of the Ancient Clerks' Well, namely the Pump House, No. 2 Ray Street, 119 yards westward, was fixed here as a memento of the past in 1878.”

W. J. Harrison	}	Churchwardens.
Geo. Blackie		

Apparently before 1800 the pump had been fixed over the well on staging renewed by ' the carpenter ' in 1765.

Referring to the inscription on the tablet (which he quotes) Cromwell makes the following observations:—

“ Part of the information here conveyed is not merely gratuitous, but unlikely to be correct; as that ' the water was greatly esteemed by the Prior and Brethren of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.' That house had no need to resort to a finer spring than the one immediately without the North wall of the Hospital Court, and which now supplies the pump before the Charity School; it had besides an abundant supply within its own precinct. Again, it is contrary to

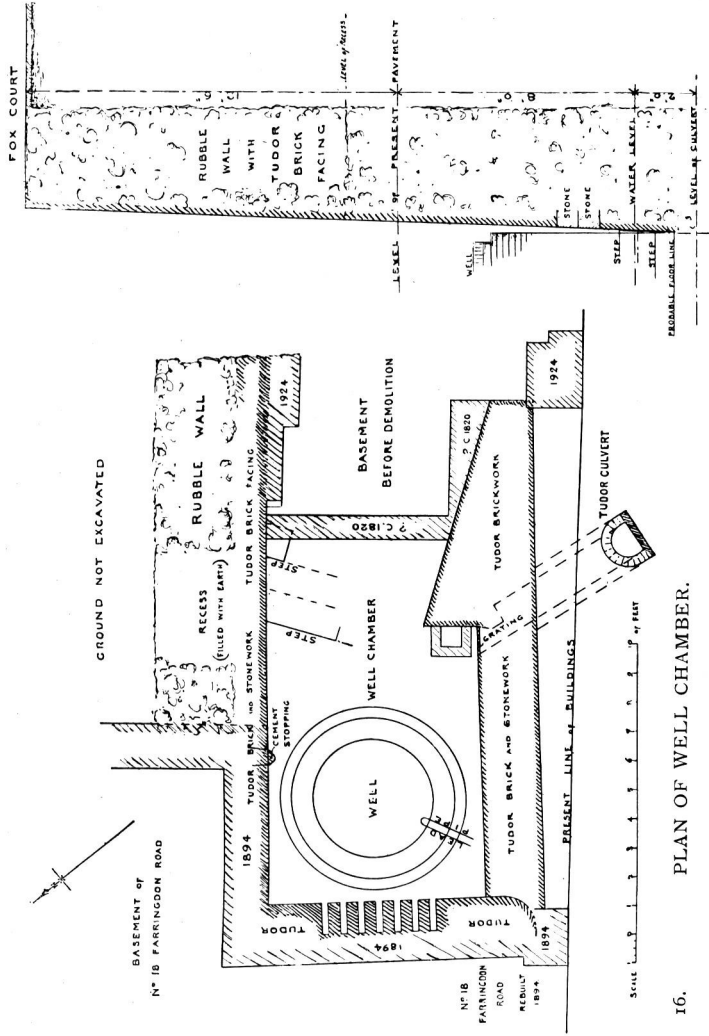
fact that this spring is 'situate four feet eastward' of the pump as it now stands; a description which correctly marks the former site of the pump itself; but the spring issues about twenty-five feet northward. The water trickles slowly into an oblong receptacle, paved with square tiles, which extends beneath the former watch-house and the adjoining shop. The dimensions of this receptacle are somewhat more than twenty-five feet by nine. An aperture in the floor of the shop enables the curious, with the assistance of a ladder, to descend into it and view the outlet of the fountain which is extremely minute, so that in summer when the water is in greatest request the store is frequently exhausted and the pavement left dry."

These notes so far as they relate to the well and the "oblong receptacle" as having existed under the floor of the watch-house erected in 1794 (No. 18 Farringdon Road) are irreconcilable with the facts disclosed in the course of the recent excavations.

Strype's Notes (see p. 70 ante) fit the facts so well that there can be no doubt that they related to the well and chamber existing at No. 16 Farringdon Road (formerly No. 2 Ray Street). Cromwell's description has so much in common with Strype's as to leave no doubt that they both saw the same well and chamber that has been discovered today.

The confusion seems to have arisen through the fact that the watch-house of Strype's time was situate on Clerkenwell Green. It is shown on Rocque's map of 1746. The old watch-house referred to by him in 1720 was the 'little house' which became the 'bird shop' and had no connection whatever with the watch-house erected in 1794, on the adjoining land to the North thereof (now No. 18 Farringdon Road). This watch-house only continued to be used as such until the year 1822 (see Pinks' History, p. 262) and to Cromwell, writing in 1828, it would be "the former watch-house," but not the 'little house which *was* the watch-house' to which Strype refers.

It is only reasonable to assume that the two churchwardens William Bound and Joseph Bird, who caused the tablet to be fixed in 1800, were fully acquainted with the source from



whence the water was pumped. The circular well 13 feet six inches deep below the present footway of the street, the bottom of which would, at that depth, be in the water bearing strata of sand and gravel lying on top of the London clay, bears witness to the accuracy of the churchwardens' statement.

A certain amount of colour may have been given to Cromwell's statement by the fact that running water has been found at many points along the East side of Ray Street, among which are No. 18 Farringdon Road (the site of the 1794 watch-house), where a sump has had to be formed in the basement to collect the water; and the 'White Swan' P.H., No. 28 Farringdon Road, where, the writer has been informed, the rebuilding of the premises, some years ago, was considerably delayed whilst special drainage works were carried out.

The existence of certain "Ironwork and Brass cocks" to which Strype refers, and the conduit mentioned by Pinks in reference to the arrangements for a supply of water to the brewer (John Crosse) may have been provided to supplement the service at the conduit head, but they in no way preclude the idea that the original and main source of the spring or well was through the chalk retaining wall of the Nunnery, as shown in Agas's Map of 1560-1570, and confirmed by Stow in 1598, which spring is still making its way through the base of the chalk wall in practically the same place..

FAGGE'S WELL.

The district of Clerkenwell was famed for wells and springs, some of which have been mentioned on p. 68. Stow in his Survey, after referring to Clerks' Well, says:—

"Other wells were near unto Clerks' Well, namely Skinners' Well; . . . Faggess Well, near unto Smithfield by the Charterhouse, now lately dammed up; Tode Well; Loder's Well and Radwell, all decayed, and so filled up that their places are hardly now discerned."

Strangely enough, about the same time as the discovery of the Clerks' Well in January, one of the smaller wells was

discovered during the course of the excavations for the rebuilding of No. 81 Cowcross Street. The well had been cut asunder vertically and revealed some brickwork which was undoubtedly built in Tudor days. The work is of the same character as the Tudor work in Clerks' Well, and the Nunnery wall, and similar to the Tudor work at Canonbury Tower and Wolsey's work at Hampton Court.

From its position between the Charterhouse and Smithfield there is every reason to believe that this is the Faggess Well referred to by Stow. Kingford's notes go far to confirm this suggestion (vide Vol. II, p. 272). The note is as follows:—

“Faggess Well. In 1197 certain lands are described as lying between the Garden of the Hospitallers and Smithfield Bar, ‘super rivulum de Fackeswell’ and other lands as between that brook and ‘Chikennelane’ (Feet of Fines, u.s.). This fixes the position of Faggess-well brook as approximately at the boundary of the City.”

It may be mentioned that lower down the hill, at Nos. 70-77 Cowcross Street, which premises like No. 81 are situate between the street and the City boundary, the bed of a stream was found in the course of the excavations for Messrs. Thos. Cook & Son's new buildings. As the fall of the land is towards the Fleet Ditch, there can be little doubt that this was the site of Faggess-well brook.

THE PARISH CLERKS.

These notes would obviously be incomplete without a word or two as to the Parish Clerks and the nature of the Plays they performed.

It should be observed that the Clerks were a fraternity of the Minor Orders of the Church, consisting of Acolytes, Exorcists, Lectors or Readers, and Doorkeepers. They were licensed as a Guild under the patronage of St. Nicholas in 1233, and in 1442 received a Charter. The Guild was dissolved and re-incorporated during the reign of Henry VIII, and after suffering various changes of fortune during succeeding reigns, was granted a Charter by James I in 1611. It still exists as one of the lesser City Companies.



19. REMAINS OF WELL, discovered at No. 81 Cowcross Street, 23rd Feb., 1924.
Presumably 'Fagges Well' referred to by STOW.

Among other duties it was responsible for the compilation of the Weekly Bills of Mortality from the year 1593 (Hy. H Harben, Dictionary of London, 1918).

The nature of the Plays performed by the Parish Clerks will be gathered from the following extracts:—

Extract from Stow's "Survey of London":—

"And for example of later time, to wit, in the year 1390, the 14th of Richard II, I read, the parish clerks of London on the 18th July, played interludes at Skinners' Well, near unto Clerks' Well, which play continued three days together; the king, queen and nobles being present."

Extract from the "Mediæval Stage," by E. K. Chambers—1903. Appendix from Issue Roll of Exchequer—Easter to Michaelmas, 1391:—

"July 11th 1391. A payment 'To the Clerks of the Parish Churches and to divers other Clerks of the City of London in money paid to them in discharge of £10, which the Lord and King commanded to be paid to them of his gift on account of the play of the Passion of Our Lord and the Creation of the World by them performed at Skynners' Well after the Feast of St. Bartholomew last past."

Extract from Stow's "Survey of London":—

"Also in the year 1409, the 10th of Henry IV, they played a play at the Skinners' Well, which lasted eight days, and was of matter from the creation of the world. There were to see the same the most part of the nobles and gentles in England."

Extract from Chambers "Mediæval Stage":—

From the "London Chronicle."

"1409. This yere was the play at Skynners' Welle which endured Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and on Soneday it was ended. (The Cotton M.S. reads Clerkenwell for Skynners' Well).¹

¹ Referring to Skinners' Well, Strype says:—

"It is almost quite lost and was so in Stow's time, but I was certainly informed "by a knowing parishioner, that it lies on the West of the Church enclosed within certain houses there. The Parish would fain recover this well again, but cannot tell where the pipes lie. But Dr. Rogers who formerly lived in an house there showed Mr. E(dmund) H(oward) late churchwarden, two marks in a wall in the "Close, where he affirmed the pipes laid that it might be known after his death." Strype's *Stow's Survey of London*, Vol. II, book IV, chap. iii. p. 69.

Clerks' Well and Skinners' Well appear to have been situated within a very short distance of each other, the plays being described indifferently as being performed at Clerks' Well or Skinners' Well. Probably the sightseers would extend all along the open ground adjoining both.—A. C.

“Accounts of the Royal Wardrobe show that a scaffold of timber was built for Henry IV and his court and the play showed ‘how God created Heaven and Earth out of nothing and how he created Adam and so on to the Day of Judgment.’

(J. H. Wylie, *Hist. of Henry IV*, IV 213).

“In 1411. ‘This year beganne a gret pley from the begynnyng of the worlde at the Skynners’ Welle that lastyd VII dayes continually and there wase the most parte Lordes and gentyllles of Ynglond.”

(*The Grey Friars Chronicle*).

(Edited J. G. Nichols—II 164).

The plays were performed on moveable two-storey platforms or “pageants”—the upper storey being the stage and the lower curtained to form a dressing room—When the whole cycle of plays was given in one place only as at Clerkenwell there would be several of these “pageants” drawn up in a semicircle, each representing a different scene, e.g., Heaven, Hell, Herod’s Palace, Pilate’s Council Chamber, etc., etc., the players moving from one to the other as the action required.