

THE **R** **H** HISTORY GROUP
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**ST MARGARET'S WELL
LINGFIELD**



There is a firm tradition that there was a well in or near Lingfield called St Margaret's Well. We thought at first that it was located somewhere in the old part of Lingfield. However, when we started trying to find the exact location we were told by Mr Sitford, an old inhabitant of Lingfield, now deceased, that he was quite sure of its whereabouts. He even remembered that the farmer, in whose property it was, had covered it with planks so that he would not be bothered with it. Both Nurse Blundell, who was then the district nurse, and Mrs Ivy Lee, who had a book about Lingfield called *History of Lingfield* by Arthur B Hayward and Stanley Hazell (Reference 1) dated 1933, had lived in Lingfield a very long time and confirmed Mr Sitford's opinion.

John Evelyn wrote to Samuel Pepys on 7th July 1694 from Wotton, Surrey saying 'Receive you my wife's who is at present become a water bibber here, though we fetch it from Lingfield, about 20 miles distant on the edge of Sussex and is stronger than the Spas of Tunbridge' (Reference 1).

It is stated in Reference 1 that the well was in Coldharbour Farm and that it was located there on an old map of the area. A well is shown on the 1: 25,000 Ordnance Survey Map of Dorking, Boxhill and Reigate (Explorer 146) in the Coldharbour area. There is also a small overgrown pond in the same area. Mr and Mrs Stripp who rent the farmland in the area allowed us to see the pond. They told us it was man made, lined with clay and that it was also very deep though now overgrown. They also confirmed that there was a well in the garden of the neighbouring Coldharbour Farmhouse. We were kindly shown this well by the owners of the house. It is a brick

lined well about 1m in diameter and protruding above the surrounding ground by about 30cm. It is at least 15m deep from surface inspection and may be deeper. The owners of Coldharbour Farm showed us an old 6-inch to the mile OS map of the area, which indicated a well in their garden and two others further to the west. These wells are not shown on the present editions of the 1 in 10,000 and 1 in 2,500 maps of the area though the pond is shown. A small circular pond or well is, however, shown on the present 1 in 25,000 map. (Reference 3)

According to the 1974 geological map of the area, Lingfield Common Road is just on the southern edge of the Weald Clay. This clay stratum is underlain by a 45m thick layer of Upper Tunbridge Wells green sand, which outcrops on the hill up to Lingfield. This sand must be the water bearing sand serving the wells to the south side of Lingfield Common Road. These must be the same sand beds from which the old well at the end of the Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells draws its water. The water in the Lingfield wells is probably, therefore, of the same quality. The fact that it is referred to by Pepys as a chalybeate well bears this out since this is also the case for the Pantiles well.

There is evidence of a Roman Road running near to Lingfield. It ran from Hassocks to Lingfield in a straight line in a slightly east of north direction and then turned just west of Lingfield to a slightly west of north direction towards London and runs straight thereafter. It is not clear why it should change direction near Lingfield but the fact that there is a good source of water in the neighbourhood may have been one of the contributory factors. It is thus possible that St Margaret's Well may predate St Margaret and date back to Roman times.

A stone step or chalice, which is said in Reference 1 to have come from the ancient St Margaret's Well and been placed on the top of the pedestal that originally held St Peter's Cross, broke at some time in the past. The County Council for safekeeping now holds it. The original base plate for the stoup still remains on the top of the pedestal. The stoup and the base plate are said in Reference 1 to have been put in position within the memory of a late inhabitant of Lingfield in the 19th century. This would mean that the remains of St Margaret's Well were still in existence in the 18th century though, no doubt, not in good repair.

One interesting point is why the well was named after St Margaret. There is also a hill to the east of Lingfield called St Margaret's Hill. Why should St Margaret be the namesake for a well and a neighbouring hill? Is it just coincidence or are they related in some way? And what is the connection of St Margaret to this area? There are not many St Margaret's recorded. The most likely contender is St Margaret of Antioch who was declared apocryphal by Pope Gelacius in 494 AD. According to legend she was a native of Antioch, daughter of a pagan priest named Aedesius. Her father scorned her for her Christian faith. Olybrices, the "praeses orientis", offered her in marriage as the price of her renunciation of Christianity but this she would not do. After various miraculous incidents she was put to death about 275 AD. The cult of St Margaret became very popular in England where more than 250 churches are dedicated to her. (Reference 2)

The well being named after St Margaret would agree with the probability of its use in the late Roman period when there was a large settlement in the Lingfield area. (Reference 3)

As a check on the comparable properties of the Coldharbour Well and the Tunbridge Wells Pantiles Well, we obtained an analysis of a sample from the existing Coldharbour Well and one of the Pantiles Well. These were substantially the same as regards the high iron content though differing to some extent in the other constituents of the samples. It is, however, the high iron content that constitutes a chalybeate water and in this respect the two analyses were very similar.

It seems pretty clear from the above that St Margaret's Well did exist, that it was situated on the south side of Lingfield Common Road and that it has been used over the years for its supposed curative properties, as was the Pantiles water in Tunbridge Wells.

As there is so little known about the treatment of the Lingfield Chalybeate waters, we turned to the next Chalybeate well at Tunbridge Wells. L Rowzee, in his book *The Queen Wells*, 1671, says that it is good for the obstruction of the liver and spleen and that it helps with all manner of diseases that cause chronic and lingering illnesses:

1. Long and tedious agues
2. Quartence and the like
3. Dropsie
4. Black and yellow jaundice
5. Hard swelling of the spleen
6. Scurvey
7. Green sickness
8. The whites in women
9. Defect or excel of their courses
10. Tough and clammy phlegm
11. Chollich
12. It cleanses all the passage of urine, gravel and stone in the kidneys, urethra or bladder
13. Inward ulcers and muscle of the spinater
14. Bloody urine, dysentery
15. All inward inflammation and hot distempers
16. It is good for the appetite
17. Nerves sinues and the brain are strengthened
18. Good against palsy
19. Apoplexy
20. Lethargy
21. Diseases of the head
22. Rheumes
23. Convulsions
24. Headache
25. Migraine
26. Vertigo
27. Against vomit or hiccup

28. Melancholy
29. Venereal diseases, also the pox
30. Worms
31. Gout (with great caution)
32. Outwardly applied it helps for eyes, red pimples and other external infirmity

In the later *Topography of Tunbridge Wells*, by R H Powell, we get analysis of the water. He finds carbonic acid gas:

33. Acts as a sedative on the mucus membranes of the stomach
34. Promotes digestion and greater secretion of gastric juices
35. Helps with circulation and regulates all functions of the body, esp. nervous system and brain through the nerves of the stomach
36. Cheers the animal spirits
37. Stimulates a languid circulation
38. Increases the red particles of the blood
39. Strengthens the digestive, muscular and nervous system.

The iron of the water is especially good for the digestive, nutritive, muscular and nervous systems, aiding, healing, and cleansing. It also helps with debility, anaemia, female complaints, abortion and sterility.

In his own words, 'As we see, the metal, iron, is the most friendly of all metals as merely in the state of protoxide combined with carbonic acid. Of course, there can be serious drawbacks, as for instance in gout. It can cause vertigo, headache, drowsiness, flushed face, nosebleed and tension around the head, flatulence or pain of stomach, but it will soon subside. To get better, the invalid must keep regular hours, rise early, take sufficient exercise, use a light and nutritious diet, take a shower bath with temperate water drying with a coarse towel.'

We add Stuart Hislop's remark about the Surrey water analysis from their laboratory at Redhill. After holding his judgement, he suggests that the best source of information may be a natural, i.e. homeopathic or holistic type of medical person, who has the right training and information. (Research by Sarah Worley)

Maybe more tests should be taken and further research carried out into this wonderfully clean and sparkling water.

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Sources:

1. *A History of Lingfield* by Arthur B Hayward and Stanley Hazell, 1933, published by Courier Printing and Publishing Co Ltd of Tunbridge Wells

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica 1963 - Margaret of Antioch
3. Ordnance Survey - Roman Britain - South Sheet (Fourth Edition (Revised))
625,000 scale
4. We gratefully acknowledge the research done by Mr Roger Whitehead

COLDHARBOUR FARM

