

Horwood Spa, near Wincanton, Somerset

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WHAT was once Horwood Spa is Horwood Well House, one mile east-south-east of Wincanton Church. It is situate on the lower beds of the geologic formation known as the Oxfordian.

The Oxfordian occurs along the eastern margin of Somerset—roughly speaking, between Frome and Henstridge to the south of Templecombe. It consists of—

Clays and shales with occasional septaria with, at or near the bottom,

Kellaways Beds—calcareous sandstone or sandy beds from 3 to 5 feet thick.

At Witham Park, H. W. Bristow estimated its thickness at 500 feet.¹

There is no village of any size on the Oxfordian tract, and the scanty population is housed mostly in scattered dwellings. The reason is not far to seek : as Mr. H. J. Osborne White has rightly said :—²

“ . . . the Oxford Clay is almost devoid of water, save in its weathered and superficial portions, whence the numerous shallow wells distributed over the outcrop surface of the formation are chiefly fed.”

The water in wells in the formation is liable to be saline—not only in Somerset, but in other counties in which the forma-

1. Geology of East Somerset, etc. (1876), p. 136 (tootnote). *Mem. Geol. Surv.*

2. Geology of Shaftesbury (1923), p. 96. *Mem. Geol. Surv.*

tion crops out. Certain such well-waters obtained considerable notoriety in the past, and one of them originated Horwood Spa.

The Rev. J. Collinson wrote :—¹

“ At Horwood common rises a mineral spring, the water whereof is used by many as an alternative for purifying the blood of scorbutick taints.”

The Rev. Wm. Phelps said :—²

“ This celebrated spring . . . had long been known to possess peculiar aperient qualities and similar in its component parts and properties to the Cheltenham water. About the year 1810, the town of Wincanton being then a depot for French officers, prisoners of war on their parole, this water, which had always been known to possess peculiar medicinal virtues, attracted their general notice. Accommodations for visitors . . . were erected, and it became frequented for a time ; but has since grown into disuse.”

Phelps gave an analysis of the water made by Hume (*see* p. 105). Mr. W. H. Forshaw, the owner of Horwood Well House, informs me (*in litt.*, 26th April, 1924) :—

“ The mineral water here is stored in a reservoir under the house. I am afraid I cannot give the dimensions of the reservoir, as it is bricked in under the house with only a small opening, but I should imagine it to be at least 10ft. x 6ft. The total depth of the well is 15ft., and the water is about 4ft. below ground level. There is a bath-room with a large stone sunken bath and a pump to pump the water into the bath. The pump is still in its original position and in working order, and the bath-room is exactly the same as when I bought the place in 1901.

“ I cannot say how fast the water comes into the well, but there is always a plentiful supply. Several years ago a large quantity was drawn to put out a rick fire, and it made very little difference to the level of the water.”

1. “The History of Somersetshire” (1791), Vol. I, p. xviii, Vol. III, p. 32.
2. “The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire,” Vol. I (1836), *Modern Somersetshire*, pp. 37*, 38*.

ANALYSIS.

1.—Made by Mr. Hume, of Long Acre, London.

In Rev. Wm. Phelps, "The History and Antiquities of Somersetshire," Vol. I (1836), p. 37*.

Carbonic acid, 7.5 cubic inches.

Sulphate of soda and sulphate of magnesia, both in a crystallized state	286	grains.
Muriate of magnesia	23	„
Muriate of soda	$\frac{1}{4}$	„
Carbonate of lime	8	„
Oxide of iron	$\frac{3}{16}$	„
Vegetable extract, clay and other contin- gent matters	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	„

2.—Made by Dr. A. Voelcker for R. Sadler, July 14th, 1879.

Solid constituents dried at 130° C. .. 849.80 grains.
per Imperial gallon.

Oxidisable organic matter	2.24
Oxide of iron and alumina, with traces of phosphoric acid .. ..	.70
Lime	42.33
Magnesia	87.33
Chlorine	34.60
Nitric acid .. ..	.64
Soluble silica .. ..	.70
Alkalies and carbonic acid (not determined separately)	
Actual (saline) ammonia .. ..	.063
Organic (albuminoid) ammonia .. ..	.056

According to these analytical data the composition of the water may be represented as follows:—

	<i>per Imperial gallon.</i>
Oxidisable organic matter	2.24
Oxide of iron and alumina, with traces of phosphoric acid .. ..	.70
Carbonate of lime	75.59
Sulphate of magnesia	261.30
Nitrate of magnesia .. ..	.87
Sulphate of soda	408.73
Chloride of sodium	57.02
Alkaline carbonates	42.65
Soluble silica .. ..	.70

Total solid constituents dried at 130° C.	849.80	grains.
Actual (saline) ammonia .. ..	.063	
Organic (albuminoid) ammonia .. ..	.056	

The water was slightly turbid and yellowish coloured. The turbidity of the water appears to be due to the escape of carbonic acid on exposure to the air causing neutral carbonate of lime to separate in the form of a white precipitate. The water has a strongly alkaline reaction and contains appreciable quantities of carbonate of soda with some carbonate of potash. It further contains large amounts of sulphate of soda (Glauber Salt) and sulphate of magnesia (Epsom Salt) and some common salt (chloride of sodium).

The total amount of sulphate of soda (anhydrous) per gallon is nearly one ounce, and there is rather more than half-an-ounce of anhydrous sulphate of magnesia in a gallon of the water.

It is a saline alkaline mineral water, possessing aperient properties.