



Ffynnon Santes Fair (Saint Mary's Well)

by Ken Davies

This is a short account of the rediscovery of the above-named well in January 1994 and the work that took place to clear the site and expose the well.

In September 1970 my wife and I moved into 67 Hillview Road, Llanrhos, Deganwy, Gwynedd, North Wales.

My father, who was born in 1901, was a native of Deganwy, and when he used to come and visit us, he often used to mention an old well called Ffynnon Fair. He said it was situated in the area of the footpath to Llanrhos Church.

This footpath was re-routed when the houses on the Hillview Estate were built, to follow the road down and to pass between No. 61 and No. 63 Hillview Road. A plot of overgrown land remained to the left and rear of No. 61.

During the time that I have lived here I have always felt that the well was worth investigating, if only to satisfy my curiosity! But I never bothered, apart from locating a letter 'W' on the OS map of the area.

The story of the great deluge and resulting flood of Llandudno that took place in June 1993 is well recorded. Llanrhos was also affected, with a torrent of water that swept down from the Vardre, swelling the small drainage ditch into a river carrying all sorts of rubbish with it. This stream runs past the rear of No. 61 and through a culvert under the garden of No. 63. The resulting mess was so bad that I contacted the Welsh Water Authority and the National Rivers Authority. To be quite fair they, or their contractors, did clear up the major part of the rubbish and cut down some overhanging trees and branches.

It was at this point that I decided to look in earnest for Ffynnon Fair. The area of the stream was very overgrown with hawthorn, convolvulus and brambles, not to mention garden rubbish that had been dumped there over the years. It soon became apparent that all I had discovered was a soggy swamp of rubbish!

As with all work of this type, it was a very slow job to clear even some of the undergrowth as it was so interwoven. There were a couple of large hawthorn trees overhanging the kissing gate and the footpath. I cut them down, cleared up some undergrowth and to my surprise I found a structure, consisting of a part-circle of stones supporting a very large capstone. This was of course Ffynnon Santes Fair, exposed to daylight for the first time in many years.

As can be expected a new and enthusiastic interest was now being shown in the project by a number of people, some just passers-by, others with sound advice or, like

my brother-in-law, Bryn Thomas, who put in a tremendous amount of work clearing the site.

The clearing of the well area started in February 1994. The first stage was to try and clear out the well and form a trench for the excess water to run away in the direction of the culvert. This meant digging out and moving about fifty barrow loads of builders' rubbish, which had been tipped into the well area to cover the culvert when the houses on the Hillview Estate were being built. This was achieved by cutting steps into the clay bank for the length of the ditch, which enabled us to climb back out of the trench as the depth of the cutting increased.

As the work progressed small fragments of glass were found. Then a 'Cod' bottle in near perfect condition came to light. It bore the name of 'William Hill, Llandudno', and was dated 1876. Other later finds included more water bottles, one with the name of 'Kay's, Llandudno', several jam-jars, graduated medicine bottles, glass stoppers and a salt-glazed ink pot. Each of these finds spurred us to put in even greater efforts.

As the excavations of the well and drainage ditch became deeper, it became a matter of urgency to protect the site and prevent any unsuspecting person falling in. At first this was done by using branches from the cut-down trees, but later an offer of fence posts came from Mr Ernie Jones of Pengarth, Conwy, and fence wire was provided by The Conwy and District Motor Cycle Club, which when erected made the area quite safe. I made a small gate with timber provided by Mr John French of Hillview Road, and it provided easy access to the well.

The clearing of the site presented us with a number of problems, the main one being what to do with the excavated soil from the well area. It was decided to keep it all and to use it to raise the bank of the stream. All the house bricks and stones were used to stabilise, drain, and form a path at the base of the bank. Another problem that had to be solved, was that the bank of clay kept falling into the stream. This was done by trimming back the bank and holding it in place with steel sheets and poles: not very pretty but effective.

As the level of silt and rubbish in the well was lowered, the water became clear and, as a result, an unusual object came to light in the form of the front end of a child's bike. The main parts were in good order, the spindle and rubber peddles turning quite freely.

To provide a good access from the gate to the well level, a series of steps had to be cut out of the clay bank causing even more spoil to be moved by barrow and placed on top of the existing waste. The steps were made by using paving slabs supported on stones dug out from the site. The problem of rising quite a steep bank over a short distance in steps worked out satisfactorily, with more paving slabs supporting the clay bank on the step sides. These slabs were once part of the pavement on Rhyl Prom.

More clearance of the silt from the well revealed a very large stone, crossing from one side of the well to the other, lying about 300mm below the surface of the water. To prevent the back-flow of water from the stream entering the well a paving slab was placed across the well as a temporary barrier. On another stone on the right-hand side

During the month of August more work was done on clearing the bed of the stream. Again this was a slow job, caused by the large amount of mud and stones that needed to be moved. A suggestion by Bryn, to make a feature in the form of an island in the stream, was taken up. This enabled us to use the stones as a foundation, and the mud as an infill and planting medium. This saved us a great deal of work and at the same time gave a pleasing feature in the stream.

In an attempt to prevent the bed of the river being scoured out by the force of the water coming out of the pipe carrying the stream, a basket was constructed out of scrap wire trays. It was then filled with large stones, and placed on the bed of the stream, with the top of the basket just below the water level and in line with the flow of the pipe. This will, hopefully, break up the force of the water during heavy rain and prevent damage to the bed of the stream.

September is the time for gardeners to start thinking of next seasons' plants, and we are not alone. The polite interest that our neighbours have shown has now turned into an enthusiastic invasion of mystery parcels containing all manner of plants that they think will be suitable for the project. The various plants and bulbs have been set into the ground, and next spring and summer they should produce quite a spectacle of Colour. If they are correct, in an ecological or conservation sense, only time will tell: but it is very difficult to refuse a well-meaning gift!

