



The Carswell Fountain

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You may wonder what a photograph of the Carswell Fountain has to do with Ock Street. As you probably know, the fountain pictured above is currently located in the wall of the Tomkin's Almshouses in Conduit Road.

But this was not always the case.

The fountain used to be inset into the wall of a cottage next to No. 89, Ock Street, at one time the Simpson grocery store. The former pub, Mr Warrick's Arms, was next-door-but-one.

The Carswell was built at the instigation of a former mayor of Abingdon, whose name, R Ely, appears on the fountain, along with the date 1719. It was originally a working fountain that had a copper dish with a tinned lining. It was fed by the "conduit" or channel of water, which is known to have existed since the thirteenth century. The source of the water derived from a number of springs, which existed in the NW corner of Albert Park. In the sixteenth century the water was collected in a large cistern over which Conduit House was built.

The cottage into which the fountain was built was demolished in the early 1940's, but the fountain was left standing in splendid isolation for some time before being re-sited in Conduit Road in 1947.

In 1917, archaeology proved that the base of the conduit, or channel, was lined with slabs – some of them ornately carved and looking like they had originated from an ecclesiastical building, perhaps the Abbey Church.

Conduit House still exists and can be seen near to the entrance in the SE corner of the park.

It no longer collects water from the springs, since these have dried up, but local residents do remember it being used to store ammunition in the war!

It is believed that the name of the fountain originated from the word “carse”, an obsolete form of cress, since watercress was known to have grown abundantly in and around the channel.

The fountain was also known by another name, viz. Castle Well. Does anyone know why?