

I was discussing the Arboretum with Chris Harris who runs the Derby Arboretum web site the other day. “What do you know about the fountain Ron” he asked. I could tell from the question that there was going to be a catch in it but I could not think what it would be so I just said that I knew there had been one but that I could not really remember it working. That in itself was a revelation to me because I lived in Arboretum Place which was just over the wall from the park and I spent every day playing on it when I was a child. Chris was not prepared to leave it at that so he came up with another question. “Where did the water come from”? Ah, that was the catch and then I realised the significance of the question. There was no pump house on the park so there had to be some system to obtain the water pressure to run the fountain. “Was it mains pressure”, I asked hoping that this would be the answer. “Unlikely,” Chris replied, “The fountain was built in 1846 but the nearest street, Harriet Street, was not completed until 1879”. “There had to be a head of water somewhere” said I stating the obvious. “Yes”, said Chris, “and I know where it was”. Chris then related his observations of the archaeologists working on the site when the renovations were being carried out. At the pavilion near the Harriet Street gate some clay pipes were unearthed and the archaeologists suggested that they were drainage pipes. However, these pipes were four inches in diameter with a two inch internal bore which would be more in keeping with pressure pipes rather than drainage pipes. What’s more they were pointing towards the fountain. Chris had not disputed the archaeologist’s interpretation at the time but a structure shown on the back of the pavilion on an old map caused him to rethink the findings. Chris realised that the pavilion backed onto the Gallows Baulk which meant that this structure had to be high up otherwise it would have been buried under the rising ground that forms Harriet Street. This was the header tank for the fountain. It made sense to me because the hills of clay that

form the high Ground around Derby would have drained near the surface, possible as a brook or stream. Collecting water for a header tank would not have been difficult and a tank at that height would have driven the fountain. What Chris went on to discover was that the pond around the fountain was designed for continuous drainage. This would be correct because if the water was not being recycled through a pump but was being supplied in a constant flow from a reservoir then the waste water would need to be drained away. He tells me that the clay drainage pipes were found leading from the fountain to Loudon Street but that they had been damaged by tree roots growing through them. The damaged pipes were drilled out and plastic pipes were then fitted to them to repair them. Needless to say I congratulated Chris on a neat bit of detective work and for adding to our historical knowledge of the first purpose designed public park in the world.