

THE RUISLIP HORSE TROUGH

by Colin Bowlt

Opposite the old Church House at the junction of Eastcote Road with the High Street is a stone horse trough (Fig. 1). It is no longer able to slake the thirst of any passing horse since it is now used to grow flowering plants. This is a fate that seems to have befallen surviving troughs in other places. At least it has survived, but perhaps only just.

But how old is it? An early photograph of the 1920s (Fig. 2) shows the trough situated in the middle of the road at the junction of Bury Street with the High Street beside the Ruislip pump, whereas a picture of c.1914 in *Around Ruislip* shows it was not there then. This ties in well with a reference in the Ruislip-Northwood Urban District Council Minutes for April 1916 that states that the Metropolitan Fountain and Cattle Trough Association had offered to provide and erect a trough in Ruislip Village.¹ The offer was accepted and it was decided to position it beside the pump.

Some earlier photographs show what could be a trough at the roadside outside St Martin's lych-gate in the High street. It was supported on four legs and appears to be a rather lightweight affair, possibly wood lined with zinc.

Although most will be familiar with such horse troughs there seem to be rather few in our area, and judging from old photographs this seems to have always been so. Surprisingly even Uxbridge and Hillingdon on the London to Oxford Road, appear not to have them, although Ken Pearce of the Uxbridge Record Society (pers.com.) remembers one by the Old Burial Ground when he was a boy. This makes the siting of one at Ruislip something of a puzzle.

The Ruislip trough was one of nearly 1000 set up under the auspices of the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association, from its foundation in 1859, until it ceased providing them in 1936, by which time horses were largely being replaced by internal combustion engines. One presumes that although the troughs were used by thirsty cattle in some market areas, the generic name 'cattle' formerly included horses. The Association changed its original name of Metropolitan Free Drinking Fountain Association in 1867 to include animals. It now survives as the Drinking Fountain Association and helps provide drinking facilities in schools, restores old fountains, and assists with well and water projects in developing countries.



Fig. 1

The early troughs were of granite but the Ruislip trough is moulded of some composite cement-like material with small dark stone chips, with internal iron bars (showing at two points of damage). The trough is 6 feet 6 inches long by 2 feet 2 inches wide with walls some 4.5 inches thick. It will be seen from Fig. 1 that it originally had a drinking fountain attached at one end. This has been missing for some years to judge from other photographs, but the signs of attachment remain. The trough was originally supported on two solid blocks, but these had disappeared even before it was removed from its original site. An inscription along one side reads: METROPOLITAN DRINKING FOUNTAIN & CATTLE TROUGH ASSOCIATION. An inscription in small italic lettering on what appears to be a stone inset in the lower right hand corner reads: *10 Victoria Street London.*

The Ruislip Horse Trough was moved to its present position in the mid 1970s, along with the village pump, from its original site in the

middle of the road where it was considered a traffic hazard. The pump was moved again in 1982 to the forecourt of the Ruislip Village Trust property, 7-15 High Street, but leaving behind the horse trough with which it had been so long associated, but now with the war memorial that was moved there in 1976.ⁱⁱ

Curiously there is actually another, and older, horse trough in the area. It is situated on the corner of Rickmansworth Road and Copsewood Way in Northwood. This has nothing to do with the Metropolitan Association but was erected by Lady Alice Morier in memory of her son who died tragically in 1892. The whole fascinating story, including the Tzar of Russia and a jasper cross, Queen Victoria, Bismark, the famous Jowett of Oxford and a death at sea, was given by Simon Morgan in the Society's Journal for 2003.ⁱⁱⁱ Just why it was sited there is not explained, but is part of the whole extraordinary tale, which could form the basis of a TV drama.



Fig. 2

ⁱ Uxbridge Library: RNUDC Minute Book April 1915-Sept 1917, p 190 and p203.

ⁱⁱ RNELHS Journal 1994, p24, Colleen Cox, *Ruislip War Memorial*.

ⁱⁱⁱ RNELHS Journal 2003, p34, Simon Morgan, *A Horse Trough and a Jasper Cross: the Moriers of Batchworth Heath*.