The Terror of the Dry Toilet

The earliest shale oil housing was built in an age before piped water and mains drainage. Deans Cottages were constructed in about 1868 to serve the short-lived Boghall Oilworks. The 1916 Ordnance Survey map shows that the 36 houses were served by just three taps (marked W.T.) and four privies, linked to ashpits. These dry toilets were said to be of a very basic form, likened to a hen’s roost, with a stick running from wall to wall to assist balance whilst squatting over a deep gullet.

The cottages were subsequently improved by constructing sculleries with flush toilets, and remained in use until the late 1950’s.

The earliest shale oil housing was built in an age before piped water and mains drainage. Water drawn from wells and burns was often scarce in the summer and prone to contamination. Piped water was gradually introduced to most villages, serving communal taps (“wells”) from which water buckets were carried home to fill.

Toilets were in brick sheds built between the rows of houses and shared by many neighbours. These were often little more than a deep pit in which human waste accumulated. Improved forms of dry closet were later introduced in which waste was collected in a bucket, mixed into an ashpit, and carted away periodically by a “scavenger” employed by the oil company.

In some cases the Scots shone prides which as one can approach, and at sightful the surrounding courts and alleys danish as such, so on-filling are the inhabitants to approach the full doses which are truly inadequate for the present needs.

Mrs J.S., born 1901, interviewed in 1985.

The existing privies are such that women cannot use them, and men should not.

A project by the Almond Valley Heritage Trust