

The land around Emmer Green contains gravel, chalk and clay. In 1654 a brick kiln was built on land called Homer's Field. The brickworks provided local employment and were still operational until the 1930s. Brickwall House was built in the early 18th century for the brickfield foreman and Brickwall Cottages were originally the office and stables. Underground caves nearby were probably in part the result of quarrying for agriculture. During the last war Reading's archives were stored in the caves, together with cardboard coffins for possible gas victims. In 1977 an ancient chalk mine was discovered and evidence showed it closed at least 100 years ago. Underground streams wear away the chalk, until the caves which are formed collapse, forming swallow holes. August Bank Holiday 1870 saw a dance hall near Brickwall House suddenly subside into one of these holes. They continue to appear out of the blue, like the hole near Southdown Road in the 1950s, and more recently Scott Close and Kidmore End Road.



KING'S POND 1908

King's Pond used to be opposite the original St Barnabas church. There were numerous natural springs (some medicinal) in the area too, particularly in Surley Row. The village pump was not far from the main pond, and supplied vital water to the blacksmith's forge. By 1950 demand for water led to the building of the 80,000 gallon reservoir and 60ft water tower at Rosehill.

One hundred and fifty years ago there were less than 300 people living in Emmer Green. The 1881 census shows how different life was for the wealthy citizens and the ordinary people. Whilst the Crawshays lived in comfort in their large house with ten servants to care for them, most other folk were very poor. Small cottages without bathroom facilities might have accommodated a family with up to nine children. Most of the adults and the older children were employed locally - men at the brickworks, on the farms or at the smithy. Many women did domestic work, or were employed at the laundry. It was traditional village life in a tight-knit community. People often lived their whole lives in houses where they were born, and inter-marriage within the village was common. There are descendants of some of these people living in Emmer Green today - Povey and Ivens are two surviving names.



EMMER GREEN SCHOOLCHILDREN 1928

Only the biggest of the many ponds remains today and it is one of the focal points in Emmer Green. Improvements have been undertaken to enhance the aesthetics, and secure the habitat for wildlife. Years ago carts would be driven into the then unfenced pond to allow the wooden wheels to swell around their iron rims, and here, too, cattle and horses quenched their thirst. There are childhood memories of skating on this and the other ponds during particularly harsh winters, not without risk either - at least one boy who fell through the ice lived to tell the tale! Thanks to Mrs Robinson we still have a pond today, for in the 1960s it was in a state of neglect and she led the campaign to save it, and introduced the waterfowl, including the delightful geese. Another pond close by disappeared when Buckingham Drive was built.