

Hidden Leeds

You might not give it a second thought as you walk along Leeds' busy streets, but there is a whole world hidden under your feet.

Sewers and water

In the 21st century we take the existence of Leeds' sewer system for granted, but it was not always like this. In the early 19th century few streets were drained and even by 1870 an estimated 30,000 (non-flushing) privies were still in use. 'Middensteads' (great piles of human dung) were still commonplace in the streets. One in Wellington Yard measured 7m by 2m and was 2m deep - and it was reported a local drunk had fallen in and drowned!

The Leeds Improvement Act of 1842 was the first measure to give the council power to construct sewers and other drainage works.

The importance of work in this area was underlined by outbreaks of deadly cholera in 1832 and 1847 - even though the transmission of the disease wasn't entirely understood. This was followed by the first Public Health Act in 1848.



A hidden mill goit or watercourse

Even then the Times called the 1848 act "a reckless invasion of property and liberty", but the size and complexity of Leeds sewers continued to grow.

Leeds was one of the first towns in Britain to have a piped water supply to houses. It came into operation in 1694 using either lead pipes or the bored trunks of elm trees.

From:

www.bbc.co.uk/leeds/content/articles/2005/04/27/local_history_hidden_leeds_feature.shtml