

**Bathing Place.** The bathing place was Holmes's best remembered provision. The concrete remnants between the Iron Bridge and Lower Mill still mark the spot where all summer boys and youths enjoyed the water. It was a sizeable structure, about thirty feet long in a remembered estimation, timber-framed with corrugated iron surrounds. A door led to a concrete floor and a bench that ran along its length. There was a corrugated roof shelter that stretched out far enough to allow one or two 'dare-devils' to dive in from a height. Shallow dives were made from the side and from the huge timber baulk that ran along the base of the structure across the brook on the Lower Mill side. Initially, according to oldest inhabitants, the water was dammed, but others remember arrangements being made to let water out of Dandridge's Mill and hold it up at Lower Mill to provide extra depth.

Snuggs Lane was then called Bath Lane by the lads hurrying along to get into the brook. As the screening ran all round the bathing place, some users frequently swam naked. No girls used it as far as could be recalled, though one man remembers girls occasionally peeping through the cracks. Another grew quite nostalgic recalling long summer afternoons in the water and sunbathing on the roof with occasional scrumping forays into the orchard behind Mill Cottages.

Eleanor Hayden walked that way early in the century and gives the bathing place an idyllic setting. The stream she says '*between two mills widens into a full, slow, broad current, fringed with the ever present willows. Through leafy orchards and meadows it creeps, providing a sequestered bathing place for the youth of the island and a quiet walk along its bank for the pensive loiterer.*' (from *Islands in the Vale*, Smith, Elder & Co. 1908)

Girls would have appeared there legitimately at Whitsuntide in the early part of the century to join the company who witnessed the latest converts of a visiting Evangelistic sect being immersed in the brook. The bathing place would have offered a suitable place for the baptism rite. Holmes allowed them the use of his mill for sleeping

accommodation. It is clear that though Holmes had no religious faith himself, he was tolerant of the faith of others. At a later period the baptism took place nearer the iron bridge where Holmes's painted seat offered a convenient place for curious onlookers.

The original recommendation for the provision of a bathing place came from another councillor, Henry Broughton, on 5th May 1896 but it was Holmes who was head of the list of the three councillors who were to arrange the erection and Holmes is traditionally credited with its creation. Six months after it was in place, the committee was asked to see to its dilapidated state (the result of a boisterous first season's use?). There are several other references in the minutes to the need to repair the bathing place. It was in use for about half a century for it was not until April 1945 that the place was declared finally unfit for use. In June 1947 the materials were sold off to villagers realising £15 4s which was put into Post Office savings.

**Trees.** Holmes is remembered for his tree planting. The minutes refer to a number of specific proposals not just for planting but for the protection of trees too. He successfully proposed the erection of a barrier around the two chestnut trees on 'Five Ways Green' in July 1902 for example. The following year he improved this area at his own expense. However, he did not always get support. In February 1913 he wanted a lime to be planted each side of the junction between Steventon Road and the main road and three Lombardy Poplars on waste ground, near Charles Tarry's house, surrounded with an unclimbable fence. There was no reason given for the lack of support of his fellow councillors for these proposals.

The minutes give a very limited account of Holmes's efforts as tree planter for in an angry letter to the *Reading Mercury* dated 28th December 1935, which was chiefly about the giant-stride swing (to be explained below), he fulminates '*That I am not opposed to the planting of trees in suitable places should be plain to the meanest intelligence from the fact that I have planted more ornamental trees to beautify the village than all the rest of the inhabitants put*