

THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY ICE HOUSE AT COLEORTON HALL



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - SEPTEMBER 2021

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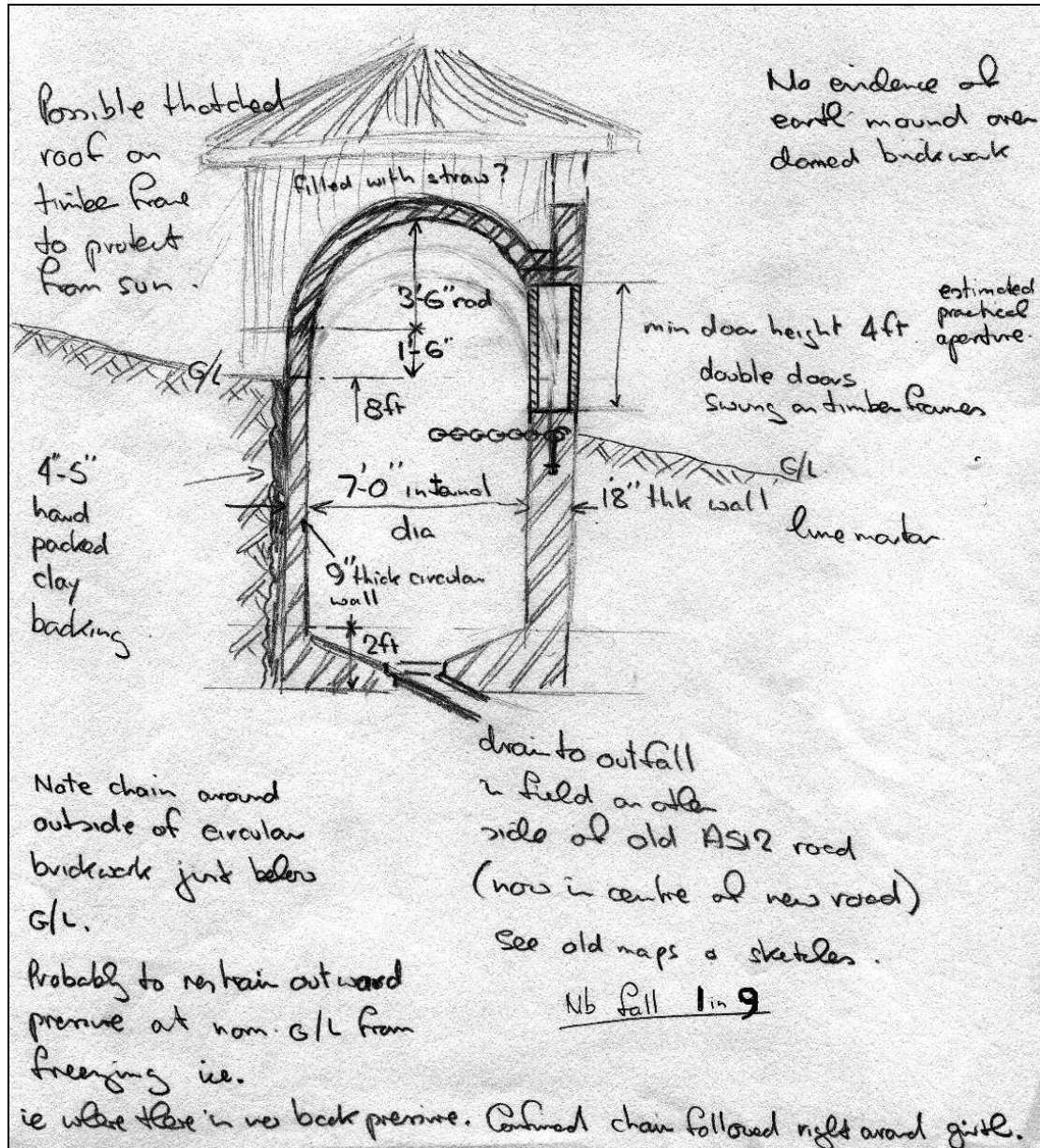
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THE COLEORTON HALL ICE HOUSE

In November 1996, John Crocker carried out a detailed survey of the “Ice House” at Coleorton Hall on behalf of the NCB. This was located approximately 100m directly south of St. Mary’s church. Below are a selection of photographs of the remains of the icehouse as it was in 1996:-



John Crocker’s interpretation of how the original Ice House may have looked is shown on the next page. He estimated that it would have held up to 4 tons of compacted ice, but in practice would be more likely 3 tons due to the confined space and difficulties in ramming. If ice was stacked up to the level of the chain (see following drawing) the capacity would have been 2 tons.



**A section through the ice house with notes annotated by John Crocker
The ice was packed in a brick cylinder 7 feet dia x 8 feet below ground level.**

Often such ice houses had a removable lid in the top of the dome to allow ice to be added quickly to prevent having to open the doors and cause a drop in temperature. There was no evidence to show whether that was the case here.

Temperatures would have been regulated by the amount of ice that was stored.

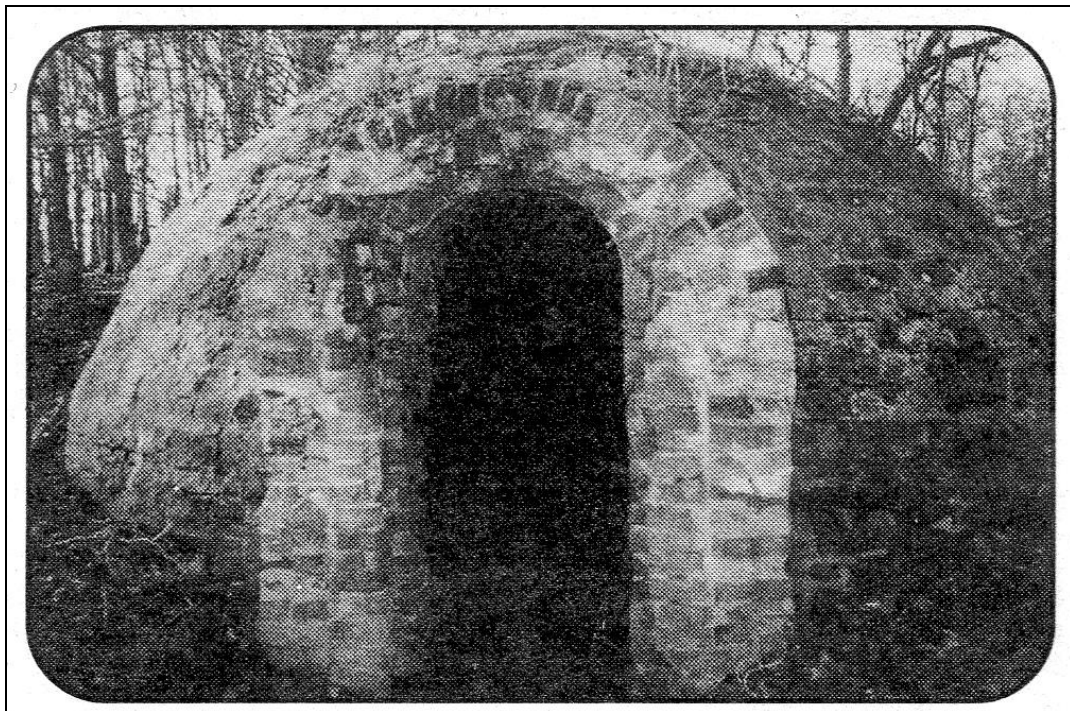
The source for the ice was "Coleorton Fishpond" approximately 0.6 miles away (downhill). Presumably it would have been brought back from the fishpond by horse drawn waggons. A chain ran right around the girth of the outside brickwork at ground level presumably to restrain outward pressure on the brickwork from freezing ice. It is thought that the Ice House was demolished by the Beaumonts' for safety reasons c.1850, after it fell out of use.

The Romans, not surprisingly, were the first people to build Ice Houses, though not very widely here in the UK. They were usually built close to sources of winter ice, such as freshwater lakes.

In the 17th century, grand country houses followed the fashion of having one built. Ice Houses tended to fall out of fashion from the late 18th century, although records exist to show the one at Coleorton Hall was in use in 1836. It was probably constructed after the manor house was re-built by the 7th baronet in 1808.

On country estates from about 1660, the ice was mainly used not to chill food, but for making ice creams and increasingly popular desserts such as syllabubs. Fish did not need to be preserved on a large estate because they could simply be caught from estate lakes and ponds when needed.

Ice was also used for medicinal purposes, to treat fever and inflammation. At one time, a common prescription for indigestion was being told to suck on ice.



**An Ice House near Wanlip, Leicestershire
of a similar design to the one at Coleorton Hall**

The following evidence from the estate account books shows that other things were being stored in the icehouse at Coleorton hall such as cheese, ale and bread and probably butter and cream would have been kept there also.

**DETAILS OF DELIVERIES TO ICE HOUSE -
FROM ESTATE ACCOUNT BOOKS**

- 1836** Thomas Herrick (Heyrick), landlord (tenant) of the Beaumont Arms, Coleorton supplied 40 quarts of ale (16s 8d) to Sir G. H. W. Beaumont on January 18th 1836, which was delivered to the "Ice House".
- 1838** Thomas Ayre supplied to Sir George Beaumont – one cheese for the Ice House at 5s 10d, also one cheese 13lb in weight at 6½d per lb = 7s 0½d. Total 12s 10½d.
Bill dated January 8th 1838, paid cash same day.
- 1836** John Wardle supplied to Mr. Cruickshank (Head Gardener), 4 loaves of bread (at 14d each), on December 31st 1836 for the Ice House - 4s 8d.
- Note-** **The Ice House was the responsibility of the Head Gardener; his bills for goods supplied to the Garden and Ice House were paid by the estate office.**