

Myddelton Sermon 2009 For the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators

The man whose life we celebrate today achieved more than most men have done for the good of the people of London. Sir Hugh Myddelton was the sixth son of Richard Myddelton. Member of parliament for Denbigh in North Wales. Born in 1560, Hugh moved to London where he became apprenticed to a goldsmith. He progressed marvelously in this trade so that he was appointed Royal Jeweller to King James I. He became an alderman and succeeded his father as MP for Denbigh. He was also a hugely successful entrepreneur, merchant and clothmaker

In the 17th century there was no reliable supply of clean water in London for the burgeoning population of the world's first industrial city. Hugh Myddelton inaugurated the great engineering scheme to divert water from the river Lea near Ware in Hertfordshire to form what was called the New River to supply London. Construction began in 1608 but the project, as you might expect, ran into financial difficulties. Generous and resourceful, Myddelton put some of his own money into the project and succeeded in getting assistance from King James.

The New River was officially declared open on the feast of St Michael and All Angels in 1613. So it is especially fitting that we should meet in this church today to give thanks for the life of the man who was the guiding spirit behind this colossal endeavour. The New River was thirty-eight miles long. In those days it was not possible to pump water over long distances and so a channel had to be dug to accommodate the stream running downhill all the way into Islington. It actually followed the hundred foot contour for the whole thirty-eight miles, dropping only five and a half inches each mile: an outstanding feat of engineering.

The New River still brings water to Londoners, but nowadays it stops at the reservoir in Stoke Newington. But there is in Islington a short length of stream preserved as a relic in a linear park. Next to it is also preserved one of the original round watch huts used by the linesmen to guard the river and stop people contaminating the water by fishing, bathing or worse activities.

Sir Hugh died in 1631, the father of ten sons and six daughters. He was buried at St Matthew's Friday Street, a church off Cheapside, where he had been churchwarden. Built in the 13th century St Matthew's was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and rebuilt by Wren. This church was demolished in 1885. There is a memorial statue of him on Islington Green. And Clerkenwell streets, close to the Round Pond, the original southern end of the New River, include Myddelton Square and Myddelton Passage. There is a school, Hugh Myddelton Primary also in Myddelton Street.

There are also about ten good portraits of him and I think we might try to select one and print on our Order of Service for next year.

In men such as Hugh Myddelton we see directly the Spirit of God at work. And of course this is the spirit of charity. What Myddelton was engaged upon all those years was a good work for the benefit of his contemporaries. And what makes this truly a godly work is the range of qualities necessary for its fulfillment. The project required generosity, and Myddelton gave richly of his own resources. It required genius and for this task Myddelton taught himself to become a superb engineer. It needed diplomatic skills to persuade others to support the project. And when things

went wrong, as they inevitably do on such ambitious projects, it required perseverance and stamina to continue the work to the end.

And so Hugh Myddelton is an example to us. Not a saint in the Prayer Book sense, but certainly one of those lights of the world in their several generations by the grace of God for the good of the whole community. For wherever a good work is achieved, there is the life of God himself. As we give thanks for the life of Hugh Myddelton, let us pray that we may follow his good example making our lives acts of charity and perseverance:

O God, thou hast created me to do thee some definite service. Thou hast committed some work to me, which thou hast not committed to another. I have my mission and purpose given by thee. Somehow I am necessary for thy purposes, as necessary in my small place as an archangel in his. Thou hast not created me for nothing. By thy help I shall do good. I shall do thy work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place and a blessing to my brothers and sisters if I do but keep thy commandments and serve thee in my calling. Amen