

"Good Morning Madam . . ."

A LIGHT-HEARTED ARTICLE ON THE WATER CHARGES BILL

by Raymond Walter, ARVA.

(By kind permission of The Rating and Valuation Association)

" . . . I'm from the local council and I've come about your drains." "Drains? My husband hasn't said that there was anything wrong with the drains."

"No Madam, I'm afraid you've misunderstood. I've come about your rates."

"Rates? I thought you said drains?"

"Yes, I did—let me explain. You see the amount of rates you pay depends on your type of drains. Now, our records show that you have a cesspit."

"Oh yes, the cesspit. Well thank you for coming, but we are getting the new half allowance on the sewerage rate. So that's all right. Goodbye."

"No, I'm sorry, it's not so simple as that. You see the sewerage rate is not the sewerage rate any more. It's now called the general services charge. From next April, provided that you are totally disconnected from the foul and surface water sewers, you will not have to pay the general services charge. . . ."

"Good."

" . . . except, that is, for a small element called, at the moment, the community services charge. This is the part attributable to water recreation and . . ."

"You mean the public swimming baths?"

"Well, no Is that your little boy? He's a bonny chap. Anyway, if you're not connected you'll also get a refund of the sewerage rate you paid for the last two years."

"Ah, yes, I remember now, there was something about this in the *Express*. My husband's worked out how much we are going to get back. Have you brought it with you?"

"Er, no. But you will not get back all you've paid, because you still have to pay this community services charge for the two previous years, and also we have to deduct the special domestic relief you received from the Government to tide you over between the elections in 1974.

You remember this, of course?"

"No."

"Oh. . . . However, if you are connected, even only to the public surface water drains, you'll have to pay the full rates in future and you will not get the refund, but you only need pay the 50 per cent charge for this year. Understand?"

"Not really. This is all very confusing and I'll have to ask my husband. What I want to know is why has this changed? This house was built over fifty years ago and we've lived here for the last twenty and there's never been any trouble before."

"Well this is because all this sort of thing which used to be the responsibility of the local council has now been handed over to the new regional water authorities. It's progress, you see, and it's nothing to do with us now."

"But you're from the Town Hall. If it's nothing to do with you, why have you come?"

"Er . . . I think it's turned a bit colder today, don't you? Now let me see—what we've got to decide is whether your surface water goes into the public drain. It's quite simple. Either you're not drained; drained but not by a sewer or drain; drained by a sewer or drain but not communicating with a public sewer; drained by a sewer or drain communicating with a watercourse but not with a public sewer; drained by a sewer or drain communicating with a drain but not with a public sewer; drained by a sewer or drain communicating with a sewer but not with a public sewer; drained by a sewer or drain communicating indirectly with a public sewer; drained by a sewer or drain communicating directly with a public sewer, or have the use of facilities which drain to a sewer or drain so communicating. Now, which one fits this property?"

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Thank you. I noticed that at the front of the house, the rain water from the roof comes down

the drainpipe, runs under the pavement and into the drain on the road. The highway drain may or may not connect to a public sewer. But what happens to the water in the sink, when you pull the plug out?"

"It goes down the"

"After that, where does it end up?"

"I'm not sure, but my husband says that some of the water ends up in the ditch at the bottom of the garden, which in the summer is usually dry, but in the winter it runs into the stream across the field there."

"That's interesting. So sometimes it runs into the stream. Some streams are public sewers but most are not. I've made a note of that. Now your garage—I see that the downpipe from the roof runs into that water butt and the overflow from the butt runs into the drain in the middle of the concrete path, but there's no sign of what happens to it then. It's going to be a hell of a job digging that little lot up."

"Pardon?"

"I . . . I mean if anything goes wrong. What we could do is to put some dye down the drain and see where it comes out."

"How will you know where to look? Anyway, I would have thought you would have known where all the drains are."

"This is a very nice cup of tea. Well, I think I have all the information I need. We'll be in touch."

"There's just one question I must ask you."

"Yes?"

"Are we connected or not?"

"Er . . . Good heavens is that the time. I must dash. I've got another thousand properties to check before the 1st April. If you have any further queries don't hesitate to get in touch."

"Right, I'll tell my husband. Goodbye. Thank you for calling and putting us in the picture."

Put all Rates on Site Values

—and let the presence or
absence of services be
reflected in the assessment
of site value