

What is an artesian well?



An overflowing artesian well is an indication that groundwater from deep within the chalk aquifer is rising up into the River Chess.

The chalk bedrock beneath the Chess Valley is complex. Within it there are many layers of rock that hold groundwater. Some of these layers of chalk are separated from each other by marl (clay) seams that do not allow water to pass easily through them. As a result, the groundwater in the chalk rock below these seams is confined and the pressure rises. Where cracks in the bedrock interrupt the marl seams, this pressurized water is able to rise to the surface under its own power as an artesian spring.

Victorian watercress farmers were quick to spot this phenomenon and drilled many wells down into the chalk to tap into this artesian water. As a result, watercress farming became a major industry in the valley and played a major part in the development of Chesham and Rickmansworth