

# Bilton Historical Society Newsletter

If you need to get in touch or have something to offer, please come to the Community Centre on Tuesday morning or contact Keith Burton on (01423) 569907 or email [yourbhsnews@gmail.com](mailto:yourbhsnews@gmail.com)

## How the countryside has changed—and prices too

### **1834 – Leeds Intelligencer, 5<sup>th</sup> July.**

Land, etc., near Harrogate

To be sold by auction, by Richard Simpson, at the Queen Hotel, in High Harrogate on Monday, the 21<sup>st</sup> July next at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the following or in such lots as may be agreed upon.

LOT 1 – All that valuable farm, situated at Longlands, at Bilton with Harrogate comprising House, barn, stable, cow-house, out-buildings, garden and orchard, 10 closes of rich arable, meadow and pasture land containing together 24 acres and now in the possession of Mr. Joseph Waite. About 3 acres of this lot held under lease from the Duchy of Lancaster of which 8 years are unexpired, subject to the Annual Rent (including Land Tax) of £2 13s. (£2.65)

LOT 2 – 5 closes of good meadow and pasture, situated at the Knox in Bilton with Harrogate, containing 17 acres (more or less) with the barn standing therein and late in the occupancy of Mr. Jona. Benn. This lot contains a bed of excellent building stone.

LOT 3 – 4 closes of very superior meadow and pasture land containing about 16 acres together with 4 cottages and two stables situated at Bachelor Gardens in Bilton with Harrogate and late in the occupation of Mr. Jona. Benn.

Lot 2 & 3 contain a quantity of thriving timber. The property, except the small part held under lease, is copyhold of the Forest of Knaresboro' and the whole is tithe free.

The above estates are in an excellent state of cultivation and form very eligible investments, being within a short distance of that much frequented and improving watering place, Harrogate and near good markets.

The farms may be viewed on application to Mr. Francis Pullan, High Harrogate and further particulars may be had of Mr. Gill and of Messrs. Powell & Son Solrs., Knaresboro'. *Can these farmlands and cottages be identified today?*

As you know the annual subscription is due at the beginning of each March, so by the time that you are reading this you have probably sent in your money, but did you remember that the committee raised the fee to £6, with £4 for each additional member at the address?

Coombes – the Final Years (Part 4)

Colin Waite

The 1960s also saw Coombes introduce an employee newsletter. This four-page publication not only featured stories on the people who worked in the company's rapidly increasing shops – at this time Coombes were opening new shops at the rate of one a week - but its warehouse, which stocked all the company's supplies and housed machinery with which operatives, using hand-held metal cutters placed under large pressing machines, produced soles and heels from hides of leather, and personnel working in the various head office departments. The newsletter also carried articles on the company's many training schemes for youngsters employed in the shops along with news of company and trade promotions which, following the lead set earlier by Arthur Bilton, encouraged and rewarded shoe repair craftsmanship. Such contests were invariably created and judged by long serving trade director, James Howker.

Like many companies of the time, Coombes was proud of the fact that it was virtually self-sufficient. In addition to its own delivery team it had its own display department and maintenance and property sections whose Harrogate-based members travelled all over the country refurbishing new and existing shops and making sure no shoe repairing machinery was out of action for any length of time – an even greater priority when stiletto heels were the height of fashion and customers with broken or scuffed heels were offered a “while-you-wait” repair service.

As well as a large office and warehouse team Coombes had, in March 1965, appointed a new managing director, Derek Walker, who had joined the Harrogate team seven years earlier. On his appointment his predecessor, Denison Turner, became chairman. The company also had a network of area managers and supervisors, many of whom had been promoted from being successful shop managers. The company also became more involved in sales of leather goods, having piloted such outlets some years earlier.

However, at the start of the 1970s things started to change for Coombes, who by now had over 350 shops, due to a number of acquisitions following the decision of parent company Walker Martin to re-organise its core business by selling its associated companies. The first of three former rival trade organisations to acquire the Coombes estate was Croydon-based Allied Shoe Repairs, who later sold the Harrogate office and warehouse site when they decided to merge northern and southern operations in Sheffield. A few years later Allied Shoe Repairs were taken over by the Mr Minit UK group who in turn were acquired by another long-term northern competitor, Timpsons, in 2003.

*As someone who spent eight extremely happy years working in the office of James Coombes and being introduced by colleagues to the Bilton area and its residents, many of whom worked for the organization, - from 1958 to 1966 I will always be grateful to the company and, in particular, two former employees: the late Harry Broughton, Coombes' office manager who spent all his working life with the company and who recruited me as post boy, a role he himself had once held; and*

*the late Brian Hiscoe, the company's first marketing manager who guided me on what became a 50 year journey in the world of public relations. My thanks also go to former colleagues David Mason and the late Irene Turner (both former Bilton residents), Brian Lindley, Peter Spence and Derek Walker for sharing their memories of the old place, to James Coombes' great nephew, Michael Edwards, of Evesham who was generous enough to let me see some of the research he had done on the Coombes family, and Arthur Bilton's grandson, Keith Bilton, who, although a resident in London for most of his life, still has many fond memories of the Harrogate area from his younger days when his father, Basil, was the last family member to hold the position of managing director, James Coombes & Company Limited.*

*Colin Waite*

*I am very grateful to Colin for all the work that he has put into this series of articles. He was unsure that anyone would be interested but the comments that I have received showed that the story was news to some and brought memories flooding back for others. It also showed me that there is a wealth of material held in people's memories, which is in danger of being lost, and that many of you could produce similar single or multi-part articles. Please don't hesitate—look for those notes, articles, photographs and mementoes that will trigger your own past histories.*

*Editor*

### The Nidd Valley Railway

Building of the railway began in September 1860 after the appropriate Act of Parliament had been passed. The line was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1862. It parted from the former Leeds to Thirsk line at Ripley Junction and followed the valley for 11 miles. The line was single track with passing places at Killinghall (named Ripley Valley from 1875 onwards), Birstwith and Dacre. Additional stations were provided at Darley in 1864 and Hampsthwaite in 1866.

Between the building and the opening was the 1861 Census which therefore listed most of the people who were working on the building of the railway. The census takers or enumerators were local men. Robert Pullan, a druggist aged 55, counted at Hampsthwaite. He and his wife, Grace, aged 49, were born at Darley. Robert neglected to enter the address of each household – perhaps thinking that he knew where the houses were so that was enough. For Menwith with Darley, the enumerator was Joseph Metcalfe, living at Low Lane – aged 38 and a farmer of 17 acres. He was also born at Darley, whereas his wife Sarah, aged 43, was born at Pateley Bridge. Comparison with the census returns for 1881 shows that many of the workmen had moved on, presumably to build another railway in a different locality. The numbers fell by 11.3% at Hampsthwaite and 11.54% at Menwith to a total of just over 1000.

In 1861 there were 32 railway workers living at Hampsthwaite out of a total population of 513. The workers were listed as lodgers or boarders with occupations such as stone-masons, plate-layers, excavators and pile drivers. Some were listed as railway labourers. It was not unusual for people to give a rather inflated descriptive name to their work! Their average age was 35 and their places of birth

were from a wide area of the North of England. It would appear that they were experienced railway builders. Only one or two were listed as of Irish extraction, and very few were local men. One interesting entry was for Peter Barker, age 52 and blind from the age of 2. His occupation was as a carpenter! By 1881 the total population was 455 and included only one railway worker. He was a plate-layer.

In 1861 at a dwelling in Green Lane, Menwith-with-Darley, the head of the household was listed as a pauper. Her daughter (aged 32) and grandson (aged 1) lived there too. Also listed were four masons as boarders, not local men. What a difference their board and lodging payments must have made to the family!

For Menwith-with-Darley in the 1881 census, the Station Master was installed in the railway station with his wife, daughter and son. The latter aged 16 must have been very proud to tell the Enumerator that he was a Locomotive Engine Fitter's

Apprentice. There were also two station cottages – one occupied by a plate-layer, his housekeeper and scholar son; the other by another plate-layer, his wife and two children.

Hampsthwaite station closed in 1950 and the last scheduled passenger train ran on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1951. Occasional excursions and goods traffic continued until 30<sup>th</sup> October 1964. The stations at Birstwith and Darley have been demolished but the buildings at Pateley Bridge and Dacre survive.



The well-restored station at Dacre in 2004.

It is now a private dwelling.

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### **Are You Ready for the "Home"**

During a visit to the doctor, Mrs Jones asked him, "How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an old people's home?"

"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," Mrs Jones said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said. "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?"

### **Senior Moments**

You don't know the meaning of embarrassment until your hip replacement sets off the metal detector at the airport.

No one is so old as a person who has outlived enthusiasm.

## What's That Smell?

David Strover

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century travellers from the North would no doubt be delighted by the broad expanse of the Yorkshire countryside as they approached the spa town of Harrogate.

In 1845 a meeting was held at Somerset Hotel, Parliament Street, Harrogate, to consider the formation of a company to light the township of Harrogate by gas. This was followed by the presentation of a Bill in Parliament seeking authority to give Harrogate a gas supply. The Act received Royal Assent in 1846.

The search began for suitable land and in 1847 the decision was made to erect gasworks on land called Nattle Crag adjoining Ripon Road at New Park. This changed the scenic approach. The smell was quite obnoxious and must have changed the business of the coaching inn on the opposite side of the road. This was the Little Wonder, built in 1840 and named after a racehorse which won The Derby in the same year. There is a story that the owner had won the money to enable him to build the inn, but any evidence of this is lost, like the name.

The New Park area was partly developed at that time, resulting in the need for a school which had been built in 1840 to cater for the families in the new housing that was springing up. When the Gasworks were built between 1847 and 1848 additional houses were needed for the workers. The first gas was produced in 1848 and by 1860 the production required 600 tons of coal to be transported by horse and cart from Starbeck coal sidings. Considering the state of the roads at that time and the capacity of one cart, this must have been a substantial traffic with the road surface suffering accordingly. In 1864 the Harrogate Gas Company purchased premises in James Street to be its showroom and main offices (perhaps to get away from the smell at the production site). This became the Gas Showrooms after nationalisation and is now the Lakeland shop.

By 1870 the increase in production and use required 2000 tons of coal (about 7 tons a day—14 cartloads). This must have caused major problems on the roads of Starbeck and High Harrogate. *We complain about Skipton Road now – how would you like to follow a couple of horse-drawn carts along there every hour each way? I wonder if they travelled at night as well. Imagine the coal dust, droppings and the creaking of the wooden wheels or rattle of the steel rims as the carts went over the stones.*

In 1871 the first steam road locomotive was purchased, obviously successful as a second was bought in 1875. Such vehicles were required to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag – the maximum speed allowed was 2 miles per hour. The walker was required to signal the engine driver when to stop in order to assist the passage of horses and carriages. In 1878 the company was fined one shilling (5p) with eleven shillings (55p) costs for failing to conform to the act (*the equivalent of £5 and £55 now*). Presumably there were increasing problems with the costs of transporting by road along such a distance and the increasing traffic past the tourist hotels and facilities of High Harrogate.

By 1880 arrangements had been made with North Eastern Railway Company for a siding to be laid at Bilton Junction. To reach the sidings the steam engines would have to travel approximately one mile down Bilton Lane but this would reduce the distance travelled by road to the works by approximately one and a half miles. Also the inconvenience would be restricted to the farm road of Bilton Lane and the workers' homes along Skipton Road thereafter. This was just in time as by 1882 annual coal tonnage had risen to 30 000 (82 tons per day).

The gasworks were considerably enlarged in 1894. 72 terraced cottages were also built at this time for Company employees – the ABCD streets off Sykes Grove, Skipton Road. The streets were called Archie, Baldwin, Christina and Duncan. There was to be another called Edwina but it was realised that the buildings would be too close to a quarry, so Edwina was not built. The streets were named after the children and other family members of the directors of the Gasworks Directors.

In 1890 the incandescent gas mantle was invented and early in the 20th century coin-slot metering was introduced, resulting in increased use and thus production of gas. In 1895 a four-wheel steam road locomotive was delivered to the works. Three more locomotives were purchased – one with rubber wheels. Round that time (1904) plans were drawn up for the construction of a narrow gauge railway to run from the coal sidings at Bilton Junction to a coal store next to the quarry opposite the gasworks on Ripon Road. The carrying capacity was estimated at 100 000 tons per annum. The land was acquired and orders were placed for rolling stock and a locomotive. In 1907 work began with the sinking of a shaft 53 feet (16m) deep to commence tunnel construction (this was to run under Skipton Road). The Chairman of the Company, Mr. Francis Barber, cut the first sod. He was presented with a silver spade which is now in the silver collection of Harrogate Corporation.

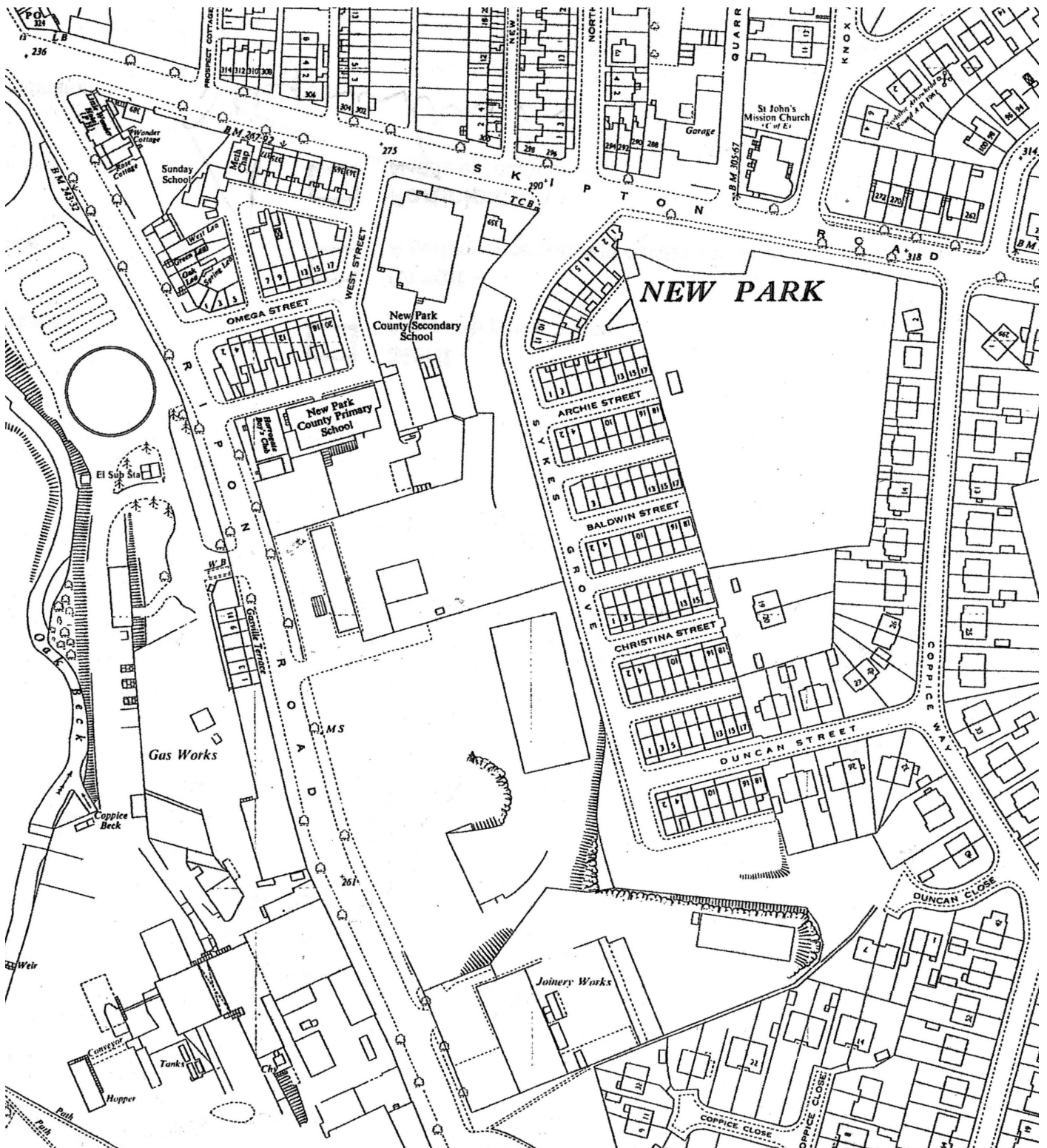
The first locomotive and wagons were delivered in 1908 and were used in construction of the line. This was the locally famous "Barber". At this time the Gas Works was employing 150 men. In late November 1908 the Gas Company took possession of the line. Between 1913 and 1915 the works were enlarged again and improvements made to plant and machinery. The first internal combustion engine was purchased—a "Willy" truck, from G. Mackay & Sons, Automobile Engineers, West Park, Harrogate.

Improvements were made to the James Street premises (offices and showroom) in 1918 and two Yorkshire steam wagons were purchased. Then in 1920 a second locomotive was purchased, named "Spencer" after the Vice-Chairman of the Company. It was later found to be useful only as a reserve to the "Barber" as it tended to slip on the gradients.

A memorial tablet was placed in the meter house in 1924 to commemorate those employees who died in the 1914/18 war. The memorial was dedicated by the Parish Vicar.

The Company purchased Pateley Bridge Gas Light and Coke Company Limited. It closed the works and used New Park works to supply gas to the whole of Nidderdale.

In 1926 the workforce declined to join the General Strike. Coke became popular due to the shortage of coal during the strike. Another steam wagon was purchased. There will be a further smaller part to complete this story of the Gas Works in the next issue.

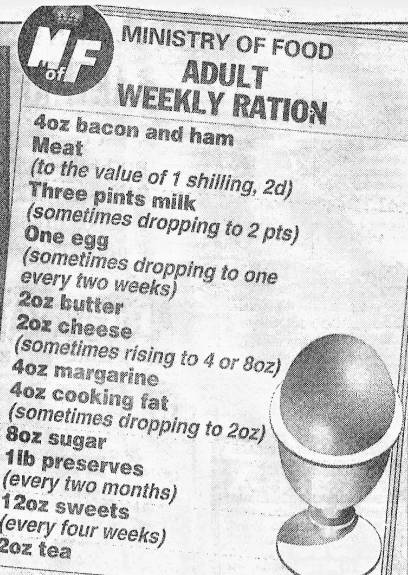


The Gasworks and New Park Area in about 1947

# wartime diet



Healthy appetites: Schoolgirls, evacuated from London in 1939, enjoy lunch



*I found this amongst our filed and forgotten records. I felt that you would like*

## RECIPES FROM THE RATION STORE

RESEARCH has confirmed that the wartime diet was far healthier than today's. To help you resume the eating habits of your forefathers — and protect your health — here are some old culinary favourites for you to try. The following recipes are taken from *We'll Eat Again* by Marguerite Patten, wartime home economist for the Ministry of Food.

### QUICK VEGETABLE SOUP

½ oz dripping or other fat      12oz mixed vegetables, diced      1 ½ pints water or stock  
Salt and pepper      Diced parsley

Method: Melt the fat in a saucepan, add the vegetables and cook gently for a good five minutes. Add the liquid and simmer slowly for 25 minutes. Season, then rub through a sieve to make a puree. Reheat and serve sprinkled with chopped parsley.

### LANCASHIRE HOTPOT

¾ lb meat      2 carrots, sliced      1 onion, or leek if possible, sliced  
3lb potatoes, peeled and sliced      1 dessertspoon fat from the meat      ½ pint vegetable stock  
1 dessertspoon flour      Pepper and salt

Method: Cut the meat into small pieces and place in a fireproof dish. Add the sliced carrots, onions and leek and pepper and salt. Add half the potatoes. Place the fat from the meat on top. Put in a moderate oven with lid on for 30 minutes. Take out, add stock, blend flour in a little water and pour into casserole. Add remainder of potatoes and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cook in a moderate oven. Remove lid for last 20 minutes and cook until the potatoes are brown.

### BREAD PUDDING

8oz stale bread      2oz grated suet or melted cooking fat  
1oz sugar      1tbs marmalade      2oz dried fruit  
1 reconstituted dried egg      Milk to mix      Ground cinnamon or grated nutmeg to taste

Method: Put bread into a basin, add cold water and leave for 15 minutes, then squeeze dry with your fingers. Return the bread to the basin, add all the other ingredients with enough milk to make a sticky consistency. If the spice is added last you can make quite certain you have the right amount. Put into greased Yorkshire pudding tin and bake in the centre of a slow oven for 1½ hours or steam in a greased basin for 2 hours.