

# Bilton Historical Society Newsletter

Edition No.3 – May 1997

## Chairman's Report

Welcome to our third newsletter. Those of you who were unable to attend the AGM may be wondering why I am writing as chairman. Bill Williams has decided for personal reasons not to continue as chairman. I was consequently elected into that role. I am very pleased to say that Bill has not left the Society and that he will still be responsible for Bilton 2000 (Bilton at the millennium). I am sure you all will join me in thanking Bill for all the hard work he has undertaken on our behalf. I am sure Bill's booklet about the history of Bilton has proven to be an inspiration to all of us.

### Projects

We still need people who are prepared to help with projects or to run their own projects. If you are thinking of your own project then what about characters from the Forest of Knaresborough, or in our case Bilton Park. John Symington's talk at the AGM was fascinating, we are extremely grateful to him. Alan Oliver has lined up another fascinating speaker with slides for the next meeting. Other areas which we have not covered but which may well be usefully researched include the pre history of Bilton.  
Bilton through the ages;  
Characters from Bilton and  
Employment in Bilton.

. If you can help with these or other projects, or know anyone who is willing to help, then please contact me.

*by Nigel Heptinstall*



## Member's Meeting

**4 June 1997**

**Bilton Community Centre**

**7.30pm**

**Guest Speaker:** Dr. MIKE YOUNGE

"Ripon at the turn of the Century, from Old Postcards".

*The talk and slide show will last about 40 minutes. Bring a guest. Non-members' welcome, cost £1.00. Members free. Subscriptions may be paid on the door.*

*It was agreed at the AGM that we should have a series of meetings with a guest speaker. Subsequent dates are as follows:*

**1 October: 3 December:**

***Please make a note in your diaries***

**Joining** Bilton Historical Society gave me the opportunity to delve into my roots. I was born at 'The Orchards' off Knox Lane, more years ago than I care to remember. The cottage was very primitive. Water was drawn from a pump. Oil lamps provided the lighting, I can remember the rosy glow from the living room lamp, a large brass vase, holding the oil and topped by a soft pink porcelain shade.

**Spruisty** Beck ran very close to the cottage. Too close for comfort really, it often overflowed into our garden. As a child it seemed like a fast flowing river to me. After the first world war my father brought two pigs and some poultry, he had set his heart on establishing a smallholding. From the hamlet of Knox through to Bilton was a prolific market garden area. Fruit trees grew in profusion.

**There** were many crab apple trees in the area. Hence Crab Lane. On reflection I cannot understand why they shortened the name. Dad was eager to improve the existing orchard, already established but needing attention. Bearing in mind the saying "*where there's muck there's money*," he had no problems enriching the soil, cows grazed nearby, there were several farms in the area.

**The** cottage was in a lovely setting, but unfortunately was very damp. My older sisters told me how lovely it was to walk to Bilton Endowed school. They crossed over a field to get to Knox Lane, formerly Old Trough Lane. In the wintry weather Dad saw them on their way.

I am very grateful to the staff of Bilton Endowed School for allowing me access to school record books. It gives me so much pleasure to browse through the reports. My father attended the school when he lived on Crab Lane. He used to tell us he was a very naughty boy sometimes, however, although there were references to this and boys especially named, he was not on the list.

**He** often referred to the mulberry tree that grew in the school area. I believe it was knocked down when the school closed. Reading some of the reports revealed that in 1889 thirty pupils were absent with measles, there were many outbreaks of diphtheria, scarletina, chickenpox, etc. One of my sisters attending the school died of pneumonia in her first year at school aged five. It was sad to note a young pupil died crossing the main railway line at Bilton Lane.

**In** 1899 the principle grant was 14 shillings, the inspector's report was most satisfactory; well-behaved children, recitation is well read, the children speak out better, but should answer more correctly. General results show good progress and a higher Principle Grant may be recommended.

**My** elder son attended the school in 1949 at five years of age, and left to go to Harrogate Grammar School. A report dated 1953 mentioned Peter Robinson tripped over a school desk iron. He received a wound over his left eye. Miss Ellis took him to hospital and he soon recovered. You can imagine I am looking forward very much when time permits to reading further reports.

**It** was very upsetting for my father when for some strange reason his livestock

died, first one and then another.

**The** soil was analysed and found to contain bleaching chemicals. The mill on the left-hand side of Knox Lane over Spruisty Bridge, which is now a dwelling, was a corn mill, the wheel still intact. Previous to that it was a bleach works, around 1850. This, I think, throws some light on the above paragraph. The tenant, Mr William Wood, confirmed to the Improvement Commissioners (1841-1884) that the water he was using was discolouring the material he used in the bleaching works. It was found that raw sewerage was polluting the water. The powers that be at first denied this, but Mr Wood relentlessly pursued his claim for compensation. Eventually, he was compensated, but after a long drawn out case which involved many people he relinquished the Bleach Works in April 1875. Needless to say the Sewerage Irrigation was vastly improved.

**The** Orchards, my home as a very small child, was demolished many years ago. It became unfit for habitation, as was the cottage adjacent to it. I can just imagine my mother's delight when we moved when I was five years old to a house with mod cons. I remember the Barber Line very well, it passed my old cottage. Knox means a great deal to me and after many, many years it is very satisfying to return to my roots. Looking across the garden of my bungalow I see the embankment and I am a stone's throw from my birthplace. I have an abundance of birds visiting my garden and they are well fed. They give me enormous pleasure and I sincerely hope it will remain rural.

# Under Red Cat Hill

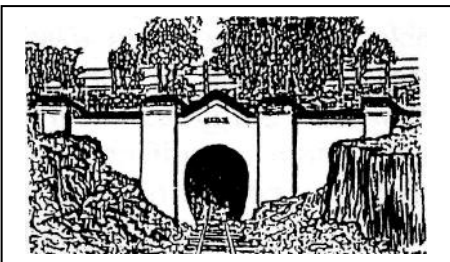
A rail journey from Billon to New Park.

How many residents of the Kebbell Estate and 'Poets Corner' recall one of Harrogate's forgotten tunnels between Skipton Road and Knox Lane woodyard?

Abandoned now for 30 years its damp silence is disturbed only by bats and spiders. Perhaps fewer have youthful memories of hitching a train ride from Billon sidings through lush summer meadows of contented cows and lazy bees.



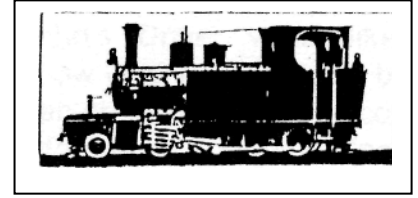
Past a haze of bluebells in Willow Wood; rattling over the cowcatchers at Bachelor Gardens the engine wheezes and strains as we enter the 1:20 gradient which curves through the Kebbell Estate to the Knox Lane girder bridge. Through a short cutting with solid rock walls we can see the black hole of the tunnel. The mind plays tricks, we know it's 9 feet high and 8 feet wide but will the train really squeeze through? Clinging to the bogie wagon for grim death it's too late to change our minds now. Sharp intake of breath; daylight deserts us along with our courage –pitch black



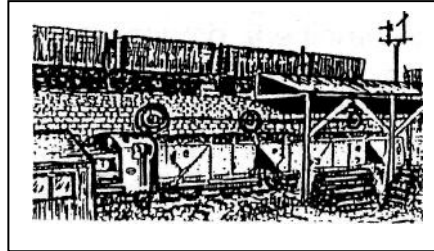
now we are dropping down and down, wheels squealing, wagons shuddering. The tunnel curves, no comforting pin point of light at the far end. Cold and damp here, the walls rush by unseen but close. How many feet of sandstone over our heads? The tar wagons bunch together, wheels and linkage protesting as the driver brakes.

Daylight! Courage returns, eyes streaming from the smoke we emerge into the sulphur laden atmosphere of the gas works siding behind New Park school .....

When Harrogate Gas Company was built in 1846 its annual consumption of 4000 tons of coal was brought three miles from Starbeck railway station by horse and cart. By 1880 the North Eastern Railway had built coal sidings at Bilton Junction to feed the 7 ton road wagons hauled by steam traction

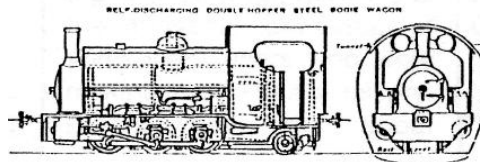
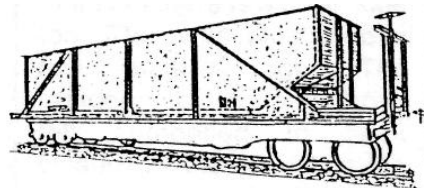


Probably one and a half million tons of coal were carried in the half century of this interesting little railway up to its closure in 1958. Some memorials remain however in the form of new street titles 'Barber', 'Spencer' and 'Peckett' recalling the names of otherwise forgotten officers of the gas company and a maker of one of the engines. The old Drewry engine was last heard of in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) hauling ore for the Rhodesia Chrome Co. Ltd. and the Peckett is believed to be in service with the Ffestiniog Railway. The Barber which retired in 1948 is to be displayed in the York Railway Museum, a fitting end to the best loved of Bilton's little engines.



engines along Bilton Lane and down the perilously steep incline of New Park Hill.

As demand for gas grew and road surfaces became too expensive to maintain it was decided in 1908 to build a narrow gauge railway to link the gas works to the main line with coal being hauled from Bilton and tar products in the other direction.



Spencer 1920 - 1943 (Scrapped 1946)

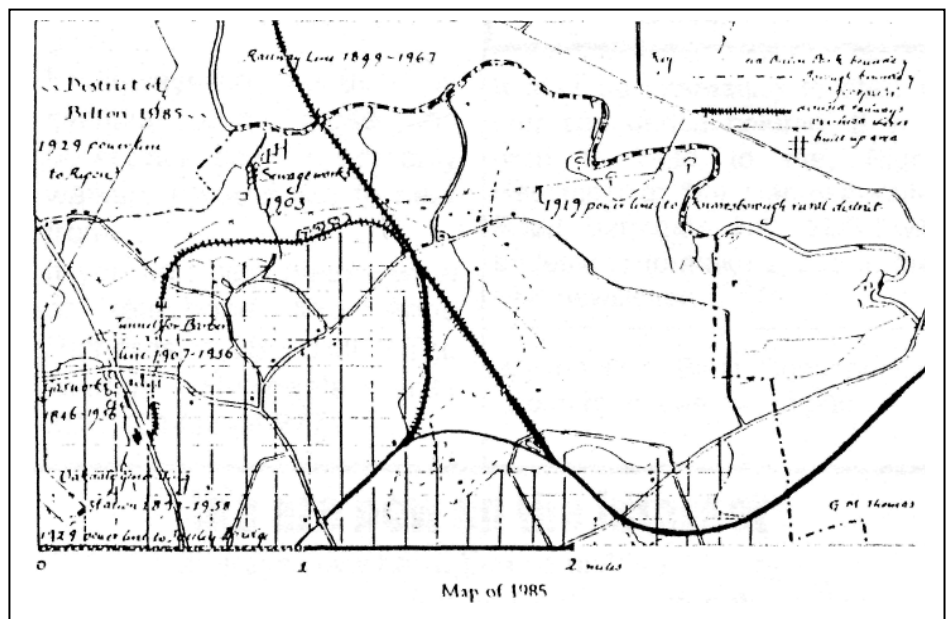
Peckett' 1944 - 1958 (Retired) Ffestiniog Railway Portmadoc.

Drewry' 1949 - 1958 (Retired) Rhodesia Chrome Ltd. (Zimbabwe)

Keith Wilkinson

"Barber" 1908-1948

Bilton Conservation Group



Reproduced Courtesy of Bill Williams

## Footpaths and Bridleways

I have chosen to study footpaths and bridleways as my project for Bilton Historical Society and would like to find out how and when they originated. This could take many years.

More immediately I wish to describe the footpaths of today for our Bilton 2000 project. We are very fortunate in having a wonderful variety of paths ranging from those in the spectacular scenery of Nidd Gorge to narrow ginnels between houses. Some paths are quite new, having been set out as part of new housing developments while others are old enough to pre-date the Forest of Knaresborough Enclosure Award of 1788. In addition to describing the physical features of the paths I would like to find out more about the people who use them.

The paths in the rural part of our area are mainly used for recreation, that is people - enjoying a walk just for the sake of it, or people taking the dog for a walk. Is there anyone using the rural paths for anything other than recreation or dog walking? I have heard of a man walking across the fields from Woodfield to Starbeck every day to go to work but I do not know who he is. Do you? If you know anyone who uses the rural path for non-recreation or dog walking purposes please contact me with the details. The paths in the urban area are a little more complex. They may be used by recreation seekers on their way to the

countryside, but they are more likely to be used by people who do not consider themselves to be walkers. These are people who use them to go shopping, to go to school, work, church, the library, the baby clinic, the pub, or to visit friends or relatives. I would like to hear from anyone who uses the urban paths and ginnels regularly to find out where they are travelling to and from and for what purpose. If you can help, or can introduce me to someone who can please get in touch.

All our paths are very valuable to those who use them but there is a down side too. This was illustrated a few months ago. The residents of Walnut Grove felt compelled to seek closure of the ginnel at the top of their street because of the antisocial behaviour of some path users who were making their lives a misery. Please tell me about unpleasant aspects of footpaths and bridleways also.

Bridleways can be used by cyclists and those on horseback so it is not only walkers I would like to hear from.

If you can help please write or telephone Mrs Anne Richards. 26 Hill Top Avenue, Harrogate, HG1 3BH (01423 508771)

## Help Wanted

**ALAN OLIVER** would like to know who would be the best person to contact to discover information about the Gospel Hall on the Woodfield Estate.

## Did You Know

That there is a well in the small triangular corner where Bilton Lane and Crab Lane make fork?

There is a Harrogate Family History Branch of the Ripon Historical Society which meets bi-monthly at the Friends Meeting House in Harrogate.

## Correspondence Column

It may be interesting to start a correspondence column. If you wish to write a letter we will endeavour to make space in the next newsletter.

My thanks to Bilton Conservation Group for the article on page 3

## We are now on the internet

address [www.harrogate.co.uk/biltonhistory](http://www.harrogate.co.uk/biltonhistory)

Our grateful thanks to Bernie Cook & Harrogate Online.

*Please note that from 2015 the internet address is:*

*[www.biltonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.biltonhistoricalsociety.org.uk)*