

BILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

September 2003 - No. 33

Editor: Anne Richards

MEMBERS EVENING

on

Wednesday, 1st October 2003

at

Bilton Community Centre

48 Bilton Lane, Harrogate

7.30pm

THE SUTTON HOO SHIP BURIALS

by Eric Houlder, L.R.P.S

ABOUT YOUR SPEAKER - ERIC MOULDER, L.R.P.S.

Eric is well known in archaeological circles. As Chairman and Field Director of the Pontefract and District Archaeological Society he was privileged to receive the Pitt Rivers Award from Prince Hassan of Jordan for the St. Aidan's Project. On the national scene he is the newsletter editor of the Archaeology and Heritage Group of the Royal Photographic Society. The latter's RPS Journal once said of him "Eric Moulder is one of Britain's leading archaeological photographers....." Having been active in archaeological photography since the 1950s his pictures have appeared in books and on television programmes on both sides of the Atlantic.

Eric is first to admit that he has been lucky to have met and worked with some of the giants of past and present including Looking Down on History, The Sutton Hoo Ship Burials, Archaeology on the Box and Mortal Remains. He also considers that it was a lucky choice to begin taking colour slides to illustrate his work as early as the 1950s. These and subsequent pictures form the basis of his talks as well as for his published work. He is no stranger to television and has recently worked with Channel Four's Time Team. Since retirement in 1997 Eric has been able to concentrate on his archaeology and presentations to the public and is a frequent contributor to "Dalesman." He is one of the few surviving people who have appeared on the same lecture programme as Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Dr Glyn Daniel. It is little wonder that his illustrated talks are in increasing demand all over the country.

HARROGATE CINEMAS

The note in newsletter 32 prompted several lively conversations and Geoff Deighton wrote down a few of his memories, these, and a short article by John Lee, are produced below. Anyone interested in this subject may like to know of a publication entitled "Remembering Harrogate Cinemas and Theatres" by Robert E. Preedy. This is available at the Tourist Information Centre for £1,50.

The old Ritz Cinema on Skipton Road at the top of Woodfield Road used to be called the Palace until Saturday, 29th November 1947 (ref. Preedy, pg 12). The manager was a man of swarthy Latin appearance named Louis. He was the scourge of the local kids who used to go to the Palace and was forever prowling round the cinema when the films were on threatening to throw out anyone who was making a noise. The back row was of double seats and reserved for courting couples. The Palace, probably undeservedly, earned the nickname "the laugh and scratch" as it was not an overly clean place.

In the years soon after the war a bunch of local lads would sometimes go to the "the pictures" three times on Saturday as there was not a great deal else to do apart from hitch illicit rides on the Barber Line. This was the time when the cinema was approaching its heyday. The three visits were to the Odeon children's club in the morning, the Scala on Cambridge Street in the afternoon and finally, the Palace at night.

Geoff Deighton

Towards the end of the war I was a member of the Odeon Saturday Morning Children's Club. The Flash Gordon serials were always eagerly looked forward to; Flash Gordon always managed to extricate himself from some death threatening incident each week. There were lots of cowboy western films starring the likes of Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Johnny Mack Brown and more. In addition to the Odeon, Harrogate also had the Scala, Regal, St James and Centra! Cinemas, and Bilton's own, the Palace (Ritz).

My own interest in all cinema is maintained to this day here in Norfolk where I give talks on "The development of the Cinema." I am also involved in the occasional re-opening of our former town cinema The Regal in Wymondham for film shows. Last March we showed a 1950 Jean Kent film where the star, now 82, graced us with her presence and the lad from Bilton gave her the vote of thanks.

John Lee

From "**Remembering Harrogate Cinemas and Theatres**" by Robert E. Preedy
The proprietor of the Palace on Skipton Road was the Palace Theatre Company Ltd of Harrogate. The Palace, with 600 seats, opened as a variety theatre and picture palace at Christmas 1914. It had a well appointed stage and in January 1915 the variety bill included pianist Billy Myles and Queen of Song, Anneta Campbell, plus the very latest films from the war. Prices ranged from 3d to 1s. The cinema soon came to dominate the Palace entertainment. It closed on 6th October 1962 the final programme being a first showing in Harrogate of the double bill "Prisoner of the Iron Mask" and "Journey to the Seventh Planet". Bingo started on Friday, 19th October 1962 and has been going strong ever since.

A LETTER FROM ST ALBANS

by Roy C. Gordon

I was intrigued to read about John Lee living at 43 St John's Drive because in the Autumn of 1940 I spent a short time at 45 St. John's Drive, staying with Miss Bertha Wright and her mother and father.

To explain how it all came about I must tell you that my father was employed in the Post Office Accountant General's Department in London. As you know Work War II broke out on 3rd September 1939 and in November of 1939 he was evacuated, with his Department, to Harrogate where he was billeted with a local family.

Many Civil Servants were sent to Harrogate from London and several hotels, such as the Cairn and Crown, were commandeered and used as offices. To the local people the Civil Servant evacuees were known as Guinea Pigs, because the people with whom they were billeted were paid one guinea per week for their food and board.

At the time my Mum and I were in a maisonette in South Croydon, I was 14 years of age. My brother, Ian, several years older was in the army in France. In the spring of 1940 there was the miracle of the Dunkirk evacuation and we learnt that Ian had come safely through and had been re-grouped in Beverley, Yorkshire.

In South Croydon we lived quite close to Croydon Airport which, at the time, was occupied by a Canadian Hurricane Squadron. Mum and I lived through the Battle of Britain and around October 1940 my father came down and brought us both to Harrogate.

Coming from London to Yorkshire was quite a culture shock for me! It was made easier by the warm welcome and kindness I received from Bertha and her parents who offered to look after me until my father found permanent accommodation. Although I only stayed with Bertha for a short while we remained friends and I often visited 45 St. John's Drive. Bertha and her family ran a business known as Wright Brothers, Slaters and Tilers. They had offices in the square behind what used to be St Luke's Church and Bertha ran the office.

In 1940 there was a farm behind the houses in that part of St John's Drive and I well remember cows coming up to the garden fence at the bottom of the garden. Much of the locality consisted of fields and meadows and I remember going for pleasant walks down Knox Lane.

I cannot say with honesty that I remember the small boy that John Lee would have been at the time I stayed at 45 St. John's Drive but I am sure that we would have said "hello."

My father found an unfurnished flat at 105 Franklin Road and we all settled down there. I attended Harrogate Technical School in Haywra Street and enrolled for the Commercial Course. The headmaster was Mr Lumsden, a strict exterior but with a kindly heart. I settled down very well and made many friends. It was a mixed class and names that I remember are Ronald Head, Denise Hodgson, Margaret Mawer -her father had a Pork Butchers Shop in Kings Road. I also remember Terrance Brennan and Jack Stoddart, both of whom lived in Grove House on Skipton Road. I also remember Colin Clapham who was a special friend to me.

We had an Army Cadet Unit at the Tech and all the boys were members under the command of Captain Kendrew, a teacher at the school. Being at war we all took it fairly seriously although we had plenty of laughs. With my London accent I often had to give a rendering of my impression of Jack Warner and his catch phrase of the day - "Mind my Bike."

Just to digress for a moment, there is a lot of talk these days of giving pupils work experience as if it was a new idea. Well, in July 1941, during the school summer holidays I worked for Harrogate Education department in the Council Offices near the Royal Hall - getting work experience. This stood me in good stead because when I left the Technical School in July 1942 I obtained employment in the West Riding Education Department at the top end of Station Parade near The Stray.

In December 1943 I was called up for my military service. On demob I went to work at the Post Office Savings Bank in the "huts" St. George's Road . It was there that I met my future wife, Margaret, and we were married at Christchurch on 11th June 1952. Margaret lived at 4 Dragon Avenue. She was born in Bilton, the youngest of five girls known as the Moreton girls.

My mother and father stayed in Harrogate after the war and spent their retirement there. In 1954 Margaret and I moved south because of my work and we have lived in and around London ever since. We have, however, many fond memories of Harrogate and have been back many times for family "do's."

OLD CHURCH HOUSE, ELECTRIC AVENUE

In the "Property" supplement of the Harrogate Advertiser dated 5th September 2004 the above was advertised for sale. It is a stone, 3 bedroomed detached built in 1850. Does anybody know why it is called Old Church *House*? *Answers to the editor, please.*

BALMORAL HOUSE

A while ago this newsletter carried a request for information about the warehouse type building behind the house on Bilton Lane adjacent to the Cinder path, or Old Mere Lane as it was once called. Shirley Dunwell supplied the information that the house was once called Balmoral and said that in the early 1900s it was occupied by her great uncle Samuel Nettleton. This fact is confirmed in a 1911 trade directory. Samuel was part of the Nettleton Builders family. Shirley remembers her mother talking about playing in those buildings which she thinks may have been connected with the building trade. Earlier the Nettletons were owners of local quarries and had ponies which it is thought were stabled at the Gardeners Arms.

KNOX HAMLET

by Eleanor Dale

Little is known about Knox Hamlet but I have seen a book (source unknown) that there used to be a bleach mill in the 1600s but after complaints about bleach in the water it was closed; I wonder if the site was where the com mill stood. The house at the old corn mill has a 1745 date inscribed over the fireplace so the mill itself is probably older. The grindstones were turned by a water wheel fed by a mill race, this flowed through fields on the west of Ripon Road then under Ripon Road near the entrance to Knox Mill Lane. Water for the mill race, which is now overgrown and dry, came from Oak Beck. The Oak Beck flowed past New Park Laundry and when the laundry was using the beck water it was difficult to get the water wheel at Knox to turn so the manager of the mill, Walter Stray, would get a friend of mine, Mrs Mary Robinson, and his daughter Eva to tread the wheel to start it. That meant walking up the wheel but never reaching the top.

I do not know the history of the cottages at Knox but I do know that when the Beck used to flood it would go into the cottages flooding the downstairs rooms.

The big house at Knox is called Moorland Court and was owned and lived in by Mr Robson who was a Director of the Aire and Calder Water Board. I am not sure, but he may have owned some of the farm land of Spruisty Farm because he had a boathouse on the banks of the River Nidd. At the side of the Lodge to Moorland Court are some stone steps which are part of a public right of way over the fields to Killinghall Bridge. It was known as Mills Bottom and the stone steps are reputed to have been used by the monks of Fountains Abbey. This could be true as the road is an old one leading from the Fountains Abbey lands near Ripley and continuing through Bilton to the south where Fountains Abbey had granges.

The packhorse bridge, Spruisty Bridge, over Oak Beck is said to have been used by James 6th of Scotland and 1st of England on his journey to London to take the English Crown. This too could be true because the wagons of his entourage would have been able to pass through the ford.

So far everything described has been in the Killinghall side of Oak Beck; in the next newsletter we will take a walk up Knox Lane on the Bilton side.

Eleanor has been asked when she is going to write her book. I can tell you that she has made a start and her efforts will appear regularly in this newsletter (ed)

NEW PARK AND BILTON RESIDENT POLICEMAN

Eleanor has provided names for some of the resident constables. They were PC Jubb and PC Armstrong whom she thinks lived in Omega Street. One of the Bilton PCs was PC Craven who lived in Hill Top Avenue, there was another in Bilton but his name cannot be recalled. Bicycle was their main form of transport. Elsie Trafford, our Canadian member, recalls that the mother of her cousin was Marjorie Jackson and she was the daughter of a local policeman who lived in a police house. Marjorie was born in 1900 and lived at Skipton Road, New Park. Her father died shortly before Marjorie was married in 1934. Her brother, also a policeman was, by this time living in Conisborough near Doncaster.

BILTON WITH HARROGATE - OUR HISTORIC INDUSTRY

Quarterly Update

Phase 2 of the project was officially launched on 12th July 2003 and what a wonderful day it was. Even before the doors of the Community Centre were officially opened people were looking round the displays and soon the room was full of people of all ages reminiscing over photographs and marvelling at the maps, plans and drawings illustrating almost forgotten local industries. It was good to welcome several people newly resident in Bilton. Almost 40 people came on the walk in the afternoon. The weather was perfect, the views were good, the archaeology had to be explained rather than seen as it was often lying beneath undergrowth; it is also possible our presence saved the wood from a terrible fate as a young man was disturbed trying to set fire to a tree. With the combined help of several participants it was possible to identify trees, birds and butterflies too. Horse riders in Milner Lane confirmed that they would be using the ford over the Nidd so it is good to know this ancient route is still in use. Back at the Community Centre a welcome cup of tea awaited and a delicious cake donated by Richard.

In August the evening walk took place on what turned out to be the second hottest day of a very hot summer. Six people who had not wilted under the heat of the day enjoyed a pleasant stroll through Willow Woods and the fields adjacent to the viaduct, their enjoyment enhanced by refreshing grapes provided by Wendy.

It was to the top of Greenhow Hill that the group journeyed to learn about the extraction, processing and use of limestone. There is nothing like the scale of Toft Gate Lime Kiln and Coldstones Quarry in Bilton and the local lime kilns and quarries are on private land or difficult of access but, it will be possible to apply the information our Consultant Archaeologist, Kevin Cale gave us in our own area. Ten people were present and some walked back to Pateley Bridge. Having made use of public transport it was possible to try and compare the speed of the bus with that of the 19th century steam engine thought to have carried coal to the top of Greenhow Hill. Opinions as to which was the most speedy method of transport were divided.

The project has received good publicity in the media with mention in several newspapers. Radio interviews for Stray FM and Radio York took place. A slide presentation was given to St. Peter's Fellowship.

Most people were baking in the sun whilst we were in the cool Bilton Community Centre working on map histories and inputting data to the computer (which is not kept at the Centre) Good progress is being made. The group is particularly excited to have discovered, with the help of archive material from West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, an old bleach yard just off Bilton Lane, (not Valley Farm - we already knew about that one). This will probably explain why buttercups do not grow in certain parts of the field.

As the weather cools down and the rain and leaves start to fall the group is preparing for a busy winter season of field work. In the field the archaeology is observed and recorded but no excavation takes place. Work inside the Community Centre will continue as not everyone is able or wishes to do field work. This is a serious project which we enjoy immensely. Remember, all the meetings are open to everyone, they are free of charge but most people donate 50p. They take place every Tuesday between 9.30am and 12.30pm. Call in and see what is happening.

This project is supported by Local Heritage Initiative, a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, Nationwide Building Society and the Countryside Agency.