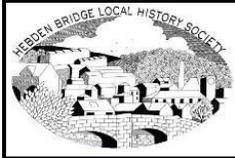


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[www.hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk)

## Spring 2021



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The society has sections for those with a particular interest in local prehistory, family history and folklore.

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Cover: Railway poster – where are we?

**Welcome** to the Spring Newsletter. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. There are reports of the lectures for 2020-2021, news from the Family History, Folklore and Prehistory sections, queries, activities and forthcoming events. If you'd like to share your research or pose a query on something historic for the Autumn 2021 issue, please send it to the Secretary by 1 August 2021.

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## Society Publications

For information on all the Society's publications, see

[www.hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk](http://www.hebdenbridgehistory.org.uk)

This last year has seen an upheaval for all of us in light of the current pandemic and I want to thank you all for your continued support. The committee spent a lot of time deliberating about how to progress with the season of talks and I have to thank them all for taking the 'bull by the horns' and discovering the technology that allowed us to transmit them online.

I think you will agree that this has turned out to be very successful and we must thank all our speakers as well for venturing into this new method of delivering their talks. It has also opened up our society to many new members, several from far away, who would not usually have been able to access the talks. This in its turn has started us thinking about the future. We would very much like to return to giving the talks to a live audience but are exploring the means of also having a way of transmitting them electronically.

We give our grateful thanks to Rachel Smith who has managed the technical side of setting up our online talks. A new skill for all of us and one that needed rehearsals for each speaker, which Rachel did, as well as organising all the applications for the talks, often with over 100 attendees. It was a quick learning curve and a big undertaking.

However, should we go forward with broadcasting future talks live not only do we need to purchase the relevant equipment, but also we need someone with the technical know-how to transmit them to the online audience. No doubt the committee will be looking for ways of doing this throughout the summer.

As yet, we have no idea what September will bring and so have to play it by ear. Hopefully, by the time we publish the Autumn Newsletter we will have better news and be able to organise the season to suit all members

*Barbara Atack*

# Family History Group

## Monumental Inscriptions at Heptonstall

For the past three years, the Family History Group has been continuing the work of transcribing the epitaphs on the graves in Heptonstall churchyard. This is still very much a “work in progress” but we have had many requests about graves and felt it useful to publish our work to date. The transcriptions so far are now accessible on our web site.

There are around 2000 gravestones in the churchyard. Of these we have now transcribed about 1400. About 600 of these transcriptions were completed several years ago under the guidance of Ken Stott but the work ceased with his death in 2003. There are three adjacent churchyards at Heptonstall. The oldest is around the Old Church and graves here date back to about 1600; the second part is around the New Church with graves dating back to about 1830. The third and newer churchyard is across Back Lane and was opened in 1911. There are some post-1911 graves and inscriptions still to be found in the old churchyard, especially where there were multiple plots. As yet no transcriptions have been made in the New Graveyard.

There are still many gravestones to transcribe and all help is very welcome. If you would like to help at our next session, please contact me. Alternatively I can arrange to meet you at some other time or designate the particular areas where transcriptions are needed.

*Barbara Atack*

## Folklore Section

So a winter goes past, one of the most prolific periods for traditional folklore, with Plot Night, Christmas and Boxing Day, mumming, New Year, The Long Company, Old New Year, Candlemas, Lady Day and a host of other dark-season celebrations – and very little do we have to show for it in this time of restrictions. And as I write, along comes Easter, and another cancellation of our Pace-Egg plays.

The interruption of our traditional calendrical markers is well-meant, generally accepted, and will, we assume, only be temporary. But will the hiatus cause a shift in how we observe traditions and the rituals of social interaction? The illicit snog at the office party or New Year – somewhere within our subconscious will be another voice of conscience, a stern social distancer figure wagging their finger at us! And there that figure is again at much less transgressive moments, when we go to hug a friend or relative, or to shake hands. These may be the seeds of new social rituals and patterns and it will surely be thesis material for many students on how society adapts post-pandemic – will some people continue to go scrambling up a dry stone wall or clinging to a slippery mud bank when they encounter someone on a public footpath? Will the Japanese custom of a small bow at a polite distance displace the handshake? Will many choose to keep with the face-masks and seek to invent a whole new lexicon of eyebrow expressions to replace the face that used to express so much? How long will it be till you attend a folk session in a pub, or dance at the Trades Club (at least rock dancing is more conducive to [anti-]social distancing than social dance...), or see morris dancers? We'll surely carelessly use the word Zoom as a verb in much the same way we use Google and Hoover, unconsciously name-checking and advertising multinational companies. Will the media

demonise new social scapegoats – out go single mothers and benefit claimants, in come conspiracists and the un-jabb'd?

This is all in the realm of contemporary folklore, cultural tradition – the patterns and habits and beliefs we develop as individuals operating within a group, whether it be society at large or a private group of anti-5G arsonists. We are all in the process of making it up as we go along, with help from media, family and friends – so keep an eye on the behaviour going on around you, the urban myths, the instinctive responses people make, and so on, because in folklore terms this period could see significant shifts from traditional modes.

From the Society's point of view, a key folklore issue over our winter of talks was my offering on corpseways, attempting to trace some customary mediaeval and early-modern funeral routes to Heptonstall, and managing to identify vestiges in the landscape. I cannot deny influence from the doom-laden narrative of the early days of the pandemic in choosing a research project on such paths, though some timely information from Murray Seccombe helped, but it yielded some real insights into these rather special routes through the local hills, and the social customs associated with them – they are part of our historical folklife and folkways, aptly described as 'vernacular routeways'. The topic obviously caught the imagination of some members, who are now looking for evidence of such routes and for protective symbols such as Marian Marks (see image); that kind of active feedback is really welcome, so thank you for any such input, and I hope we will be able to identify some more of these elusive routes in future.



Resting or 'coffin' stone in Cragg Vale, showing crossed-W  
Marian Mark

*John Billingsley*

## Prehistory Section

'The prehistoric archaeology of Calderdale has got a year older more or less on its own - much like the rest of us. Fieldwork, finds, excavations - nope.

One saving grace has been the great outpouring of online lectures, talks and Zooms from the Prehistoric Society, the Neolithic Studies Group, the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, and many other bodies and individuals. Mostly free!

Keeping track and attending in real time has often been tricky, but fortunately most events are recorded and appear on YouTube - a treasure trove for armchair/settee archaeologists. You can search for essentially any prehistoric topic and be overfaced by the results. Highly recommended.

Hopefully the latter part of the year will be more locally productive...'

*David Shepherd*

# Lecture Reports 2020 - 2021

**23 September 2020**

**WOMEN OF PROPERTY**

**David Cant**

**The role of women locally  
at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

As David Cant launched the online Autumn series of lectures, an audience of more than eighty people were logged into the 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon of a 'Zoom webinar' ready to be transported back to the seventeenth century. David was exploring the documentary evidence for the role of women at this time, especially using surviving wills and inventories.

Our ideas about women might be influenced by the images in portraits, but these tend to be restricted to the wealthier classes. Guides to conduct printed for the growing middle classes offer another glimpse of the domestic accomplishments women were expected to exhibit, expressed in the words of Northowram's dissenting cleric Oliver Heywood, who praised his wife as 'provident and prudent' in her management of the home. However, these depictions are partial.

Life in the Calder Valley could be hard, with the majority of the large parish of Halifax being predominantly rural, and dependent on the dual economy of agriculture and textiles. Halifax could be seen as remote, but there were links to ports and to other market towns which enabled the parish to benefit from the expansion of trade at this time. Local visitors gave mixed reviews: Celia Fiennes decided to avoid the town as it was 'so stony and ruined'. Daniel Defoe on the other hand was impressed by the industry of the people 'all full of business.'

Local documents such as court rolls have very few mentions of women, who mainly faced charges such as selling underweight bread. Very telling though is the conviction in April 1688 of Mary Wilkinson and Mary Robert for 'common scolds'. They were sentenced to be 'cucked' - that is ducked on the cuckold into the river. Obstreperous women were perhaps not to be tolerated. On the other hand, documents also suggest that women could have power, and another Wilkinson, Dorothy, is recorded in 1689 as owning two fulling mills and a messuage in Warley.

The most revealing documents are probably the wills and probate documents from Halifax Parish that local groups have been transcribing and publishing, covering the last twelve years of the seventeenth century. Fewer than 30 per cent of the population made wills, and locally only about one in fifteen of these were women.

The main focus of wills was to dispose of land and property, and women feature prominently as beneficiaries. The established local custom was that a widow received a third of her husband's personal wealth and property, and land and buildings were often used to finance legacies for annuities or to give lump sums to daughters and sisters. Most wills showed some equivalence in their provision for male and female descendants, though the males most commonly inherited the real estate.

Wives and daughters appear too as executrixes, with one example of a thirteen-year-old appointed to execute her father's will, who nominated the wife of the Heptonstall curate to undertake the task in her stead. Such renunciations were not common though and most women took up their appointed role.

From the six townships around Hebden Bridge thirteen out of eighty-four sets of documents were wills made by women, the majority being widows. Martha Eastwood of Fallingroyd (Follanroyde), a spinster, left a chest, a desk and a saddle and some riding clothes to two named individual women, and also made monetary bequests to a further twenty-five possible relatives. Her household goods amounted to less than £8, but she had money out on loan totalling £95 – a considerable amount. Grace Travis of Stansfield, a widow, also made monetary bequests to her young relatives, of amounts between £20 and £80 and also left land to her brother. A niece received some of her household goods, a relatively modest collection of possessions. Most of Grace Travis's wealth was in the money that she had out on loan – there were fifteen such loans, all to men. Most were for small amounts, but she had lent £350 to a Richard Patchett. The credit that was available from rich widows like Grace Travis may well have been providing capital for the growing textile industry. Such examples are found throughout the Calder Valley.

David pointed out that women were invariably defined in these documents by their marital status while men were described by their occupation or social status, but the documentary evidence challenges this stereotype of the passive and domestic female. Women were clearly playing a wider role in the commercial life of the Calder Valley.

**14 October 2020**

**THE LOW MOOR MUNITIONS  
EXPLOSION OF 1916**

**Mary and Geoff  
Twentyman**

This was a dramatic and engaging exploration of the devastating explosion of the Munitions Factory at Low Moor Bradford in 1916 – an accident waiting to happen. Mary and Geoff Twentyman, with colleague Barbara Reardon, have been researching this area of Bradford for many years, and their talk provided a master class in the use of a variety of different historical records and sources.

OS maps of the period show that the factory, located at Low Moor, south of Bradford and close to Shelf, was part of an industrial development with an adjacent iron works, dye works and a gasometer. On Monday 21 August 1916, that proved crucial to the seriousness of the explosion.

First stop for researchers, the National Archive at Kew, revealed some fascinating claim forms from local residents for broken crockery, damaged windows and some rebuilding work – but it was a shock to Mary and Barbara that a significant number of documents relating to the accident had actually been destroyed, with just a few samples retained. However, other archives and sources filled in much of the picture. The picric acid that was used in the process of making explosives had to be handled very carefully, and it seems that due precautions were not followed when transporting the drums of the dry acid. The official inquiry noted that as it was a sunny day, the drums were not covered with tarpaulins as the regulations required, and the drums were probably dragged on cobbles causing friction and the initial spark. A hissing from the drum was heard, and flames were seen, and then came the explosion.

The archives of the Fire Brigade filled in some more of the

dramatic details of a rescue involving several fire brigades, including the Works Fire Brigade and engines from Odsal and Bradford. When the engines arrived they were met by the fleeing workers and hindered by the restricted access of a protected site. A series of explosions blew up the first of the fire engines, killing the chief fire officer. The works manager was also in charge of the Works Fire Brigade and was seen crawling from debris, but died soon after. The fire brigade accounted for 7 of the 40 casualties, many only identifiable by the identity number inscribed on their axes.

One of the most poignant parts of the talk was the work done to identify and put faces to the victims of the disaster. There were no contemporary newspaper accounts, as strict censorship ruled out such negative stories at the height of the war. The women, who made up the majority of the workers, suffered mainly superficial injuries. Other workers were not so lucky; men in the picric acid works, a police officer and railway fireman were among those killed. Some individual stories emerged: a worker aged just 17 died on his first day at work, having twice tried to join the army and serve at the front, his mother had persuaded him to take what she saw as a safe job. Photographs of the devastated site bear an uncanny resemblance to images of the Somme, which was still very raw in the memory. Family photos of those who died or who were recognised for their bravery give extra power to the stories, and are a reminder of the importance of such records. Firemen, police and telephone operators were among those awarded gallantry medals.

The work done by Mary, Barbara and Geoff has brought into focus the identities of those who died, who are now commemorated on a board close to the site, on the Spen Valley Greenway walk. A book written by Barbara Reardon and Mary Twentyman records these stories, and its title 'Yellow Poppies' recalls the way the skin of the munitions workers was turned

yellow by the picric acid. Another happy result of the research has been the human connections: family members who, often for the first time, have been contacted and were able to learn the details of the death or heroism of their ancestors.

**11 November 2020**

### **The Alan Petford Annual Memorial Lecture**

**THE FIELDENS AND THEIR LEGACY  
IN TODMORDEN**

**Anne Mealia**

The story of the Fieldens in Todmorden is one of rags to riches, Anne Mealia, local historian and genealogist, told her audience at the well-attended Zoom meeting. There's hardly any aspect of life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Todmorden that the Fieldens didn't influence in some way, and their mark is found in the striking buildings that give the town much of its character.

The Fielden name is found in Todmorden from the sixteenth century and is still common today, and Anne pinpointed the growth of the family's fortunes to the decision by Joshua Fielden to move his business from Edge End Farm on the hillside, into the town itself. At Edge End Farm Joshua, like many other yeomen farmers, operated as a woollen manufacturer selling cloth in both Halifax and Manchester. He obviously saw an opportunity to make use of the newly-opened turnpike road as well as an abundant water supply when he bought three cottages at Laneside in 1782. In these cottages he installed spinning jennies and the business rapidly expanded with carding and weaving, moving to new premises along the road at Waterside mill (on the site of Morrison's supermarket). After Joshua's death the business passed to his sons and Fielden brothers became one of the biggest and most successful textile manufacturers with a reputation for good quality.

The success of textile manufacturing meant that the next generation of Fieldens had the security of capital, and invested in the rising industries such as railways, gas and property development. Their business interests stretched way beyond Todmorden, to South America and New York. In a generation Fielden brothers had gone from three cottages to an international business.

The most famous Fielden is 'Honest' John, who became a Radical MP for Oldham, alongside William Cobbett. He had left school at ten and worked with his father Joshua, learning the business at first hand. He became a champion of a minimum wage for weavers, of the Ten Hour Act which limited child labour and a fierce opponent of the new Poor Law, which meant that Todmorden held out against establishing a Union Workhouse for thirty years. For many years he and his family had lived opposite the mill, at Dawson Weir, but he moved from the noise and bustle to a house which better reflected his wealth and status – Centre Vale.

He was also a strong supporter of Unitarianism, abandoning the Quaker faith of many of his forebears. He set up a Unitarian chapel, paying all the expenses of a minister. After his death, his three sons – Samuel, John and Joshua - though following separate business paths, united to build a lavish new Unitarian church, bringing in celebrated architect John Gibson, who designed a stunning Gothic style building, with materials such as Sicilian marble and stained glass from Brussels, no doubt helping to inflate the price from the planned £6,000 to £36,000.

John Gibson became the Fieldens' favourite architect, and when John Fielden junior wanted to build a castle on the hills for his bride, Gibson presented him with Dobroyd Castle. Its Gothic exterior of local stone contrasts with a classical interior again using the most opulent materials. The so-called 'Brass Castle'

(designed to show off new wealth) was not a home to Fielden and his wife for long though. In the latter part of the century John and his second wife tried to fight the scourge of drunkenness by establishing a Coffee Tavern and Temperance Hotel, next to the Golden Lion, offering smoking and billiards along with sarsaparilla and the mysteriously named 'Che-oak' herbal tonic. The people of Todmorden clearly didn't flock there and it closed within a few years.

John Gibson's architecture continued to shape Todmorden, with the magnificent and imposing Todmorden Town Hall glorifying the industry of the valley town. John's brother Joshua employed Gibson to extend Stansfield Hall with the addition of a billiard room, ballroom, gatehouse and a row of new cottages to block out an unsightly view. When Joshua left the town to head south, he commissioned Gibson to create the lavish Nutfield Priory in Surrey.

The eldest of the three brothers, Samuel, stayed in Todmorden and died one of the richest men in England. He inherited the house at Centre Vale, which Gibson was again set to redesign, including creating the extensive gardens. Samuel was a supporter of cricket in the town, setting aside some land for a cricket pitch. His wife Sarah was also a philanthropist, setting up a school for girls at Fielden school (also designed by Gibson and now Fielden Hall). After her death the building was given to the town with the stipulation that it be used for educational purposes. Centre Vale house succumbed to dry rot and was demolished in the 1950s.

As the textile business was no longer an important source of wealth, the later generations of Fieldens tended to move away from Todmorden. What they saw around them was 'damp, dirty and dull' contrasting with the magnificent buildings that they left behind from a time when they had dominated the life of the

town. Anne's research into the family brings them back into clearer focus.

**25 November 2020**

**LAURA ANNIE WILLSON**  
**Suffragette, builder, engineer**

**Anne Kirker**



Working class women from Halifax have often lived and died without leaving any mark, but Anne Kirker, local and family historian, recounted a fascinating story to an online meeting of Hebden Bridge Local History Society of a woman who is justly seen as quite extraordinary. Laura Annie Buckley was born to a poor working-class family in Halifax and went to work as a half-timer in a local textile mill. This was the common fate of girls of the time, and the education she received would have been basic.

However, she must have had a keen sense of curiosity about the world, and an even stronger sense of injustice and a desire for a more equal society with a voice for women in decision making.

Her marriage to George Willson, machine tool maker and partner in Engineering company Smith, Barker and Willson, gave her the grounding she needed to support her growing desire to fight for social justice. Her background as a trades unionist and member of the Independent Labour Party all contributed to her political education and she took on organisational roles, including as first secretary of the Women's Labour League. She supported two notable local bitter strikes involving the Halifax tram drivers and the Hebden Bridge fustian weavers. The Halifax branch of the Women's Social and Political Union, fighting for female suffrage, gave a focus to her activism, and her conviction for 'unlawful assembly' in Hebden Bridge led to fourteen days imprisonment in Armley gaol. Something of her character emerges from the reports of the trial when she demanded a female lawyer and the right to be tried by her peers (i.e. women). She claimed when she was released that she went to gaol a rebel but came out 'a regular terror'. She was arrested a month later in London and spent another fourteen days in Holloway. She remained a prominent local leader of suffragettes in the Halifax area who knew that her ideas were inflammatory, admitting 'if they could sentence me for thinking I would have to be sentenced for life.'

Laura Annie's beliefs about female equality took a practical form, as from 1912 her involvement in her husband's engineering firm increased. Here she could prove her point about the abilities of women, and she was responsible for recruiting women as highly skilled workers. She herself learnt each job to prove that women could indeed cope with factory work. Her principles were still strong – she introduced innovations such as paid holidays, well maintained lavatories and a canteen shared by all employees,

providing ninety dinners a day. The wartime necessity for female skilled labour in making machine tools was such that Laura Annie and George Willson were seen as exemplars of what needed to be done. In 1917 Laura Annie received one of the first of the new honour of MBE in recognition of her work. This might suggest that Laura Annie was now part of the establishment, but a newspaper report of the company appealing against a fine for resisting the 'Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act' which would replace the women with men, is good evidence that her spirit was still rebellious.

In the post war years Laura Annie continued in her groundbreaking activities, being a founder member of the Women's Engineering Society to try to protect the rights of women in engineering jobs. She spoke in what seem startlingly modern terms against stereotyping and the right of a woman to work at job to which she is suited. She strongly believed that willing co-operation with a workforce led to better outcomes and better wages. Her practical approach to improving women's lives, was seen in the motto (Emancipation from Drudgery) of the Electrical Association for Women of which she was also a founding member.

All these achievements seem enough for any one person, but Laura Annie Willson went on in the 1920s to pursue another career, also rooted in that belief that people deserved better lives. The most practical way to improve life was by improving housing, and her final identity as 'a builder of considerable prominence' has left its mark on the landscape of Halifax. The first woman member of the National Federation of Housebuilders was responsible for houses in Halifax (at Well Head) Ovenden (Laurel Crescent and Vegal Crescent) Luddenden Foot (Throstle Mount) and on the Pye Nest Estate at Sowerby Bridge. These followed her principles of well planned, well-built and affordable housing, with innovative electrical

power, bathrooms and gardens. Later when Laura Annie and George moved to Surrey, she built houses in Egham and Walton on Thames.

It was fascinating to hear of a woman of such humble origins whose pragmatic principles took her to success in so many areas which were seen as out of the reach of women. Anne's research has been enhanced by contact with Laura Annie's granddaughter, who was able to provide photographs and family stories to confirm the impression of Laura Annie as a truly magnificent woman.

**9 December 2020**

**COMMON PROBLEMS**

**Professor Angus Winchester**

**The history of common land  
in northern England**

Northern England contains the largest expanses of common land in the country, but this is only a fraction of what existed before the enclosure of moorland commons in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Our attitudes to such common lands have changed over the centuries from being seen and managed as a valuable shared local resource in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the privatisation and enclosures of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and on to the attitudes which prevail today, when such land is increasingly seen as having value for conservation and recreation.

Common land had a particular form of ownership: it was owned by the lord of the manor but tenants had rights to use the land in various ways. These common rights usually included rights to graze animals, to dig peat and turves, to take bracken and wood and sometimes the right to fish. Keeping a balance of these rights and sorting out disputes was a local matter in the hands of the

manor court which was made up of a jury of tenants. The records kept by these manor courts provide the evidence about how the system worked. Sometimes the archives include documents setting out the rules and penalties for breaking them, but more often historians can work out the rules by inspecting the court rolls where charges are laid and penalties recorded. Such institutions were found throughout Europe, establishing byelaws and managing the rules locally.

A key principle for maintaining the communal system was the concept of 'necessary use' – that what was taken from the common land was for use within the manor, and not to be sold on for profit. These grassroot rules were an attempt to ensure that the conflicting uses of the commons were equitable and promoted a 'good neighbourhood'. These were likely to include controlling the number of animals grazing, keeping walls and fences in good condition, and making sure that rams were not let loose among the ewes at the wrong time. Fines were levied on those who allowed dogs to chase sheep, or put a 'scabbed horse' out on the common.

There were some complex rules to try to prevent unscrupulous tenants from exploiting what should be shared resources – for example insisting that a tenant could only pasture at common expense the number of animals that in winter were able to be maintained on his own farm. Rules also governed the taking of peat for fuel and turf for roofing, especially the good neighbourliness of 'bedding your peat pots' – making good after removing the peat to preserve grazing. Vegetation on the common land was also valuable and its equitable use needed to be monitored. Bracken could be taken for 'necessary use' for thatching or for animal bedding, but it could also command a price when burned for potash used in soap-making. The manor courts attempted to juggle competing demands with very local and sophisticated rules about the times of year and the method

of extraction, ensuring that someone needing roofing had priority.

Another form of shared land for grazing was the use of stinted pastures. A group of tenants might enclose and share land for pasture and would agree a formula for how many animals could be put there to graze. Again there was a sophisticated and entirely grassroots system of rules to govern this, with a number of 'cattle-gates' – equivalent to one horned animal or perhaps three sheep - being designated per acre to prevent over grazing.

It was fascinating to see evidence of such local governance persisting into the twentieth century, with the minute books of the Scales Moor gateholders (near Ingleton) recording the practicalities of managing the shared land, appointing a shepherd, and setting aside the profits from one cattle-gate to pay for a mole catcher. The physical evidence of this local democracy still stands on Scales Moor – a barn with 'a modicum of comfort' (a fireplace) providing a neutral place to meet.

The practicality of the grassroots local approach to managing and sharing resources according to principles of equity and good neighbourliness was deep rooted in small hill farming communities, and it felt like an appealing model for local democracy. It was also salutary to be reminded that common land was not land which allowed the right of free access until 2000, when the Countryside Rights of Way Act made commons open to all.

## **13 January 2021**

### **JOURNEYS BETWEEN THE WORLDS**

**John Billingsley**

The paths that we use to explore our landscape carry the marks of those who used them over the centuries, but some were of

special significance, to the living and the dead. John Billingsley, local historian and folklorist, told a capacity Zoom meeting about the tracks along which the bodies and souls of the dead were taken to their final resting place. John has traced some of these ancestral routes, known as corpse ways, which led to the churchyard in Heptonstall.

Some of these old paths can be identified by names on maps though the use of dialect and euphemism can disguise them. Hiding in plain sight was the Course road in Heptonstall which used an old version of corpse – corse. The spelling disguised its origin until the discovery of a document from 1619 that clearly identified it as a corseway. Looking at puzzling place names can offer clues – a Church lane or Kirkgate that are not close to churches suggest their traditional use. There was a strong inclination to keep to these ancestral routes even when more convenient highways were made. Somehow it was more respectful to keep on an old route, away from humdrum everyday life. Also there were superstitions about ghosts that reinforced tradition – some believed that the soul of the dead followed the old route, and deviation might mean they could not rest in peace.

Corpse ways tend to have recognisable features – sufficient width for the body to be carried on a bier or stretcher, following a gradient that would not tax the bearers too much, and sometimes flat stones by the way where the body could be rested. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century bodies would be carried in sealed canvas shrouds, not heavy coffins, meaning that long journeys over the hills were more practicable. John used maps and photographs to take the audience on a virtual walk along some of the corpse ways. One from Cragg Vale over boggy Erringden moor had an alternative bad weather path, where names such as Old Harry Lane and Haven Lane suggest both the nickname of the devil and of Heaven. Haven Lane offers the first distant view of the church

at Heptonstall. Further along is Dole Lane, where gifts might customarily be 'doled out' to the funeral party. The route continues through Old Chamber where there are some field names referring to 'Boggarts' again possibly maintaining the folk memory of the supernatural potential of a route for the dead. From Hebden Bridge the route was followed up Hangingroyd Lane and the Buttress.

The Old Course road mentioned on the nineteenth century OS map leads from Mytholm to Heptonstall. On the way, Lily Hall also has suggestions of funeral rites in its name, and maybe lilies, the traditional flower of death, were sold here. Finally the route makes a little detour at Church Lane in Heptonstall to ensure that the body entered the churchyard in a clockwise direction.

Another corseway is mentioned in a legal document in 1619, demanding that the landowner maintains the route. He was responsible for the stretch from Hebble Hole to Learing Hey. Close to the bridge at Hebble Hole, John speculates that a large flat stone could have been a coffin stone or resting place, the river providing a place of refreshment here.

Although the bearing of the dead across open country to a resting place in hallowed ground is no longer part of our traditions, superstitions and folk memories are long lasting. It is probably no coincidence that along these routes are stories of ghosts and hauntings into the twentieth century – the painter working on Chantry (or Charnel) house in Heptonstall in the 1960s who was confronted by ghostly feet, or a driver who told of knocking over a dog and its master who then disappeared, another ghostly manifestation on an old corpse way. The shroud itself has fed into our cartoon vision of ghosts as wailing sheets. Stories endure and attach themselves to places of significance to our forebears. Folklore, as John said, focuses on the soul's final journey, lending these routes a sense of sacredness.

**27 January 2021**

**THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL HOUSING  
IN HEPTONSTALL**

**Mary Ellen**

Just over a hundred years after the call from David Lloyd George to build 'Homes fit for Heroes,' cultural historian Mary Ellen celebrated the history of the Heptonstall Council Estate. Her Zoomed talk was testament to the optimism and ambition to demolish slums and house working people in decent and roomy accommodation, especially those returning from war. She described a widespread feeling that things must change, and that a 'new Jerusalem' was possible.

The planning of the new social housing drew on the Tudor Walters report which put healthy living at the heart of the designs for the new estates. Influenced by the Garden City movement, the report specified that access to sunlight, spacious rooms and a bath were essential. It was fascinating to see the detail of the plans for the 5 different grades of housing which became a template for the new estates. All had three bedrooms, and generous living rooms. They included a scullery, and some featured built-in cupboards and storage in the hallway for pram or bicycle.

With subsidies from central government approved under the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1919, councils could purchase land and start building. Some estates were built on a massive scale, to cope with the widespread clearance of slums deemed unsuitable for modern living. The Wythenshawe estate in Manchester and the Becontree estate in Barking each had more than 20,000 houses; Heptonstall of course was much smaller, with just 56 houses in the first build on the West Laithe site.

There were long negotiations with the owner of the land, John Sutcliffe, but the council could fall back on the right of

compulsory purchase under the Housing Acts passed between 1930 and 1935. The land was purchased at a cost of £100 per acre, and further compensation paid to people who claimed for loss of business and income. The rural district council signed the contract with builders Oldfield Watson in October 1938 at a cost of £25,382. The architect was John Thomas Cockcroft and the housing was designed to curve around a central communal grass space, with privet hedges to be maintained. In addition to the houses a row of bungalows was also built, with the first tenants taking possession in September 1939. Standards of building and design were high, with local stone from the Scotland quarries in Midgley, and a surprise bonus of fine decorative stone brought from a demolished stately home, New Worsley Hall.

The second wave of the estate had to wait until the end of the second world war, when a further 44 houses were built, quickly followed by 10 pre-fabs, the small factory-built dwellings that were originally intended to last for 10 years – but proved surprisingly popular. What was achieved in Heptonstall was a harmonious integration of new housing and the rural surroundings. It was fascinating and rather inspiring to see how the dream of homes fit for heroes was translated into solid buildings and a site on a human scale.

## **10 February 2021**

### **WHO BUILT HEBDEN BRIDGE?**

**Michael Peel**

Michael Peel's talk brought to life the history of the buildings that make up Hebden Bridge's 'Victorian Quarter' and form an important part of the character of the town. The talk focused on the area known as 'the Croft' between Commercial Street, New Road and Bridge Gate, which until the 1860s was an open field. Grand buildings such as Hope Chapel, the Co-op Hall and the

Library form just part of what was built during this productive period. Drawing on documents in local archives and on reports in contemporary newspapers, Michael was able to go back to the plans produced for the sale of lots of building land in this roughly triangular shaped part of the emerging town.

One contemporary source was Joseph Sugden, who wrote in the Hebden Bridge newspaper as 'Josephus', and gave a vivid picture of the state of the town before the development with poor roads and a 'deposit of filth'. The Patchett family, local innkeepers, owned the land which was first put up for sale unsuccessfully in 1855, and then again in 1856. Problems of drainage and water supply had to be overcome, and the Patchetts sank a cistern holding 18,000 gallons of water from the springs of Birchcliffe. A sale in 1864 of smaller plots saw more local entrepreneurs take their chances as the development expanded to include residential and business properties.

The demand for housing saw mixed development of the space, with the 'respectable middle class' Machpelah and smaller dwellings, often with a shop on the ground floor and living accommodation above. The list of various shops and the multitude of things that they sold was very evocative of a different kind of high street in Victorian times, and photographs of windows stashed with all kind of goods added to the picture. New public houses were built to meet the needs of the population and of visitors. The Railway Inn opened in 1861 with brew house and stabling, though the landlord was reputed to be 'not of good character'. The Albert was built on land bought by William Coup expressly for the purpose, with a coach house and stables. Having no licence to sell spirits, it was deemed to be 'a respectable house.'

Emerging from the talk was a roll call of local characters who gained their wealth through manufacturing and wanted to

invest in property that would both enhance their town and provide a healthy profit. The Croft was an area of industrial development, with a gasometer, a timber yard, and Hartley and Crabtree's iron foundry as well as the textile mills such as Albert Mill and Croft Mill. The Albion Iron and Tinplate Works on Carlton Street produced tin trunks which must have accompanied many a voyager. Many of these entrepreneurs became leading lights in local politics and the bedrock of societies and churches.

Hope Baptist Chapel was one of the first buildings to be constructed on the area known as the Croft in 1857. Soon there was a Sunday School extension with classrooms and meeting rooms, and an extension for infants. It was this building that was eventually sold to the County Council and converted to the Library that is still enjoyed today. Other notable buildings were the Police Station on Hope Street and the grand buildings that were constructed as banks – the Hebden Bridge Joint Stock Company enjoying a prestigious building on the corner of Albert and Hope Street – the first bank to open in Hebden Bridge, and the last one to close in recent years. The Manchester and Liverpool District Bank occupied the building on the corner of Crown Street and New Road. The Co-operative Society had a magnificent building on Carlton Street, with meeting rooms for hundreds of people at a time when there seemed to have been a real hunger to learn. On Carlton Street now Youth House stands unoccupied, but it is a monument to that spirit. Built by Josiah Wade as a memorial to his sister, the Wade Institute opened after his death. The architecture of Oxford House on Albert Street still attracts attention. This was built for James Gibson, a dentist who advertised his expertise in providing 'operations without pain' using the latest inventions.

As for who literally built Hebden Bridge, Michael knows there is more exploration to be done and is keen to share the groundwork

he has covered already. One of the main builders was Lewis Crabtree whose company was behind much of the construction in the 1850s and 60s. As well as Oxford House and the Co-operative building, signs of his idiosyncratic decorative style can be seen on many of the houses in the area.

The detailed research carried out by Michael Peel was part of the preparation for a Hebden Bridge History Society exhibition planned to open in Hebden Bridge Town Hall in March this year. However, the Covid restrictions prevented this. The displays are ready to go, so look out for an exhibition that will give residents and visitors a chance to explore the history of the town and its buildings more fully.



**24 February 2021**

**JOHN F BATEMAN**

**Michael O'Grady**

**Britain's foremost reservoir engineer**

**The making of Hebden's earth embankment reservoirs**

During this year of staying at home, many of us have probably been walking in the hills, and no doubt drawn to the reservoirs above Hebden Bridge. Michael O'Grady, senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Huddersfield, combining his interest in local history with a past career in civil engineering, has investigated the details of the construction of the reservoirs at Widdop, Gorple and Walshaw Dean. In a fascinating Zoom talk he explored their construction, and the stellar career of John F. Bateman, the engineer behind their planning and design.

Bateman was born in 1810, in the Moravian settlement at Lower Wyke, Halifax, and lived and had his education in other settlements in Fairfield, near Manchester and Ockbrook in Derbyshire. He was apprenticed to a William Dunn of Oldham, a surveying and mining engineering business, where he learnt a wide range of skills. This was a time of great change with the rapid growth of industrial towns and cities along with revolutions in transport such as canals and railways. A particular problem was the increased demand for water, and the problems of disease such as cholera which arose from polluted water supplies.

At the age of 23 Bateman set up his own consultancy in Manchester and began to engage with some of the problems of water supply and flooding. As well as his engineering skills, Bateman was a great communicator, relying on detailed studies of rainfall quantities, analysis of the effects of geography and the financial costings to influence those in power to embark on a

programme of reservoir building. He was able to make projections about the growth of population and the demand for water, and to show that using reservoirs to collect water, and a network of pipes and aqueducts to transport it would provide millions of gallons of good soft water to industry and people living in towns.

Among Bateman's achievements were the Longdendale chain of linked reservoirs supplying Manchester, with the innovation of running water in homes paid for by a new water rate. A plan to create an artificial lake at Thirlmere in the Lake District and transport water to Manchester 96 miles through pipes and aqueducts was completed after his death. Glasgow was supplied with 51 gallons of water per day from a scheme at Loch Katrine and an ambitious plan brought water from Wales to London, supplying 224 million gallons daily. Among his achievements abroad were the draining of a swamp in Majorca, a flood scheme for the River Shannon in Ireland and even a scheme to build a Channel tunnel out of cast iron.

Michael has combined what was known of Bateman's designs and methods of building the clay-sealed earth embankments with scouring old maps, aerial photography, digital maps, LIDAR scans of the topography and old photographs from the Pennine Horizons Digital Archive, along with the essential element of walking the landscape and discovering the reality of the features suggested by these images.

Bateman was brought in by Halifax Corporation at a time when there were real worries about the water supply to the town. Bateman's answer was to build reservoirs high above the town with a higher and lower one so that the water supply could be regulated. This was a technique he had used before and required a sequence of aqueducts and pipes to take the water to the town using gravity rather than pumps. Widdop reservoir was opened

in 1870. The reservoirs were built using an earth embankment, and puddled clay was used to create a waterproof surface, which had to be worked or trodden in. The earth that was removed had to be taken away using a complex system of railways with carts filled with spoil pulled originally by horses. Railway technology was essential for the project, and turntables and incline returns were used to send back the empty carts. In the area around Widdop some of these tracks are visible in the landscape, others can be guessed at with the use of maps and aerial photos.

Other evidence emerges from the quiet moorland scene, especially when unusual hollows and bumps are revealed in a light coating of snow. Michael has identified where huts were erected and higher than usual walls revealing that spoil had been tipped there. Stone for the reservoirs was available on the hills, and evidence of these small quarries is also scattered around the area.

The Walshaw Dean reservoirs, built between 1900 – 1913, and those at Gorple, followed the principles of the design of John F. Bateman, who died in 1889. They made great use of railways, including the famous Enoch's engine which transported navvies from their temporary home at 'Dawson City'. There was a famous trestle bridge which carried the railway across the steep valley, and Michael has discovered marks of the piers of a second bridge, and also evidence of another navvy settlement. There was more mechanisation than in Bateman's period, but manpower was still crucial.

John F. Bateman was widely celebrated in his time, and in 1869 represented the Royal Society at the opening of one of the wonders of the age, the Suez Canal. A year later the influence of his visit to Egypt emerged in the architectural style he adopted at Widdop. Still standing is a little valve house, now a listed building, Egyptian in style and serving to commemorate the

world-wide reach of the innovative engineer responsible for first bringing piped water to the people of Halifax.

For most of us walking the hills, the reservoirs are just a feature of the landscape, tranquil places which belie the immense task of removing earth, disposing of the spoil, extracting clay and stone for the building and accommodating the gangs of men who were performing this extraordinary transformation. After hearing the story of John F. Bateman, we will perhaps walk with eyes more attuned to the marks made on the landscape by these men.

**10 March 2021**

**LLOYD GEORGE, SPANISH FLU, AND THE 1918 GENERAL ELECTION** **Alan Fowler**

In 1918, during the final months of the war, Lloyd George was already planning to fight a General Election as ‘the man who won the war.’ As Alan Fowler, former lecturer in economic and social history at Manchester Metropolitan University explained, things did not turn out quite as he planned.

Lloyd George visited Manchester in September 1918 to accept the honour of Freeman of the City and intending to kick start a campaign, but he was taken ill and forced to spend a week in the Mayor’s parlour, with no mention that he was a victim of the ‘Spanish’ flu that was sweeping the country. (As Alan pointed out, this pandemic only gained its name because Spain was not involved in fighting a war, and hence had not censored press reports of the outbreak. The scale of the epidemic was not made public until later, when after the third wave the number of British dead reached 250,000.)

In 1916, Lloyd George had broken with Asquith, leader of the Liberal party, and formed a coalition government which

included Conservative and Labour support. He intended to capitalise on the peace to run for election as leader of the coalition, but during the course of the campaign things changed. The Liberal party was seriously split, with those who supported the coalition receiving 'coupons' to show that they were endorsed by Lloyd George.

The old order was changing, with an extension of the franchise to all men over 21 and women over 30 who owned property. The constituency of the Calder Valley – Sowerby, Hebden Bridge and Todmorden – had returned a Liberal MP consistently, sometimes unopposed. The combination of widespread religious non-conformity, the Co-operative movement and the free trade principles of the cotton trade all fed into the Liberal tradition. The sitting Liberal MP was John Sharp Higham, a supporter of Free Trade and friend of Lloyd George. The Conservative candidate was Algernon Simpson-Hinchliffe, who had married the rich widowed heiress Helen Hinchliffe of Cragg Hall, and had stood in previous elections. For the first time a growing Labour Party also put up a candidate, John Willie Ogden, a self-taught man who had risen to become president of the Amalgamated Weavers Association which had a strong presence in Todmorden. By 1918 he was president of the TUC.

Labour had distanced themselves from the Lloyd George coalition after the signing of the armistice, and would fight the election on issues of education, housing and social reform.

Higham was a supporter of the coalition and though he did not accept the 'coupon' which showed his colours, Hinchliffe was persuaded to withdraw in order to give him a free run. Local Conservatives were outraged and possibly nervous about the chances of Ogden, a strong local Labour candidate. They turned to a Major Robert Hewitt Barker. He was a Todmorden man of impeccable military service, in Gallipoli, the Middle East and

France and stood as a representative of the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, but was de facto an Independent Conservative.

The cotton spinners' strike was another possible threat to the coalition, especially in a constituency like Sowerby, but Lloyd George intervened by offering a large advance of 30 per cent and extending the settlement to the weavers as well.

Nationally, the election proved a success for the Conservatives and the few Liberals who had the Lloyd George coupon. The Asquith Liberal party was comprehensively defeated. Locally, the previous Conservative vote stayed with the Independent Barker, with very little change in support from previous years. But much of Higham's vote shifted to Ogden, the Labour candidate. The result was a three-way split, with Higham coming bottom of the poll and Major Barker winning with only a third of the vote but a majority of 981. Alan felt that there was little evidence that the expansion of the franchise had affected the result, and with a programme to send ballots out to the military in France, there was embarrassment that only 20 per cent of soldiers voted. The apparent non-political candidate had won in an election of the most intense politics.

**24 March 2021**

**Jane Ellis**

**AROUND THE UK IN CLASSIC  
RAILWAY POSTERS**

As the desire to venture beyond our local streets grows, we gathered around computer screens for the final Zoom of the season, to feed that desire with a feast of colourful railway posters promoting the excitement and promise of a journey by rail. The speaker, Jane Ellis, who is actively involved with the Industrial History Section of Yorkshire Archaeological &

Historical Society, has been running the Yorkshire branch of the Railway Ramblers' Club for over twenty-five years. She explained that the "golden age" of the railway poster was probably between the wars, but their history is almost as old as the railways. As soon as numbers of passengers began to throng in the stations, adverts for a multitude of products covered the walls, to the extent that 'Bovril' might have looked like the name of your stop at some local station.

At first the railway companies produced posters promoting their special excursions, giving information about timetables and prices and enticing people to take the train to the races or to go Christmas shopping. Soon however the railway companies seemed to engage in dreams of the romance of travel, with stylish depictions of famous beauty spots and heritage sites. 'See Britain by Rail' became the slogan, featuring attractions like Bamburgh Castle and York Minster, the wild hills of the Peak District and mountains of Scotland, as well as bracing Skegness.

The competing railway companies began to employ noted artists, including members of the Royal Academy such as Laura Knight, who depicted the Yorkshire coast, and Norman Wilkinson, whose art used powerful graphic images with limited colours to capture the essence of a place such as Anglesey or Inverness for the LMS. The work of another notable artist, Terence Cuneo, was of a more dramatic style, often depicting the glamour of the journey and the power of the engines steaming through the landscape. It seems he took his work seriously as he was photographed perched on the girders of the Tay bridge to get the best viewpoint of the oncoming train.

Railway posters emphasised the outdoor life as trains were seen as the ideal way to get out in the country to go rambling, horse riding or playing golf. Seeking health also led to the expansion of spa resorts, and many railway posters feature the attractions

of Harrogate and Bath. Thomas Cook was one of the first to see the leisure potential of trains, and railway companies competed with their prime hotels such as the Waverley in Edinburgh and Morecambe's art deco Midland Hotel. The locomotives themselves were glamourised, given identities such as the Royal Scot, the Brighton Belle and the Flying Scotsman and starring in the railway posters. The fancy dining cars offering sophisticated meals were also a feature of this glamorous age.

A special sub-set of railway posters are the carriage prints – the letterbox shaped pictures that filled the gap between seat back and luggage rack and gave passengers something to look at instead of the faces of those sharing the compartment. The heyday of the railway posters was between the two world wars, and by the time of the second world war instead of being enticed to see Britain by rail, people were being asked 'Is your journey really necessary?' Something which is all too familiar these days!

## Obituary

Catherine Emberson, a member of our society, lost her battle with cancer at the end of February. She met her late husband, writer and artist Ian Emberson in 1988, through the Brontë Society and they married in 1994.

Some years ago they came to our society to give a talk about their interest in the Brontës. After the talk I mentioned that during my research into Hebden Bridge Parish Church, I recalled reading in the Parish Magazine something about the Brontës written by a past vicar, George Sowden. They were very excited by this news and hastened to search for the magazine. This led them to publish their research in 2005, *George Sowden: Recollections of the Brontës*, thus establishing a connection between Hebden Bridge and the family. They jointly wrote a number of articles for *Brontë Studies*, the Journal of the Brontë Society, including *A Missing Link: the Brontës, the Sowdens and the Listers*, in 2007'.

Having been born and brought up in Todmorden, Catherine was also interested in the local writer William Holt, and published a short biography for the Todmorden Antiquarian Society's Millennium book, *Todmorden Cameos*. In 2008 she gave a talk to our society - "William Holt – The All or Nothing Man".

For many years, Catherine was the town clerk for Todmorden Council, and in the last few years the president of the Todmorden Antiquarian Society. Ian died unexpectedly in 2013, and Catherine decided to protect and preserve his legacy of poetry, art and publications by maintaining his website [www.ianemberson.co.uk](http://www.ianemberson.co.uk) She added a tribute page and archive of some of his writings. She went on to publish some of his works e.g. *Bright Sari in a Darkened Street* in 2018 - perhaps a modern "Cathy and Heathcliff" love story?

*Diana Monahan*

## **Meetings and Archive Opening**

At the moment all group activities are suspended due to the Covid-19 virus. When we are able to re-open this will be announced on our webpage, by email to members and in the press.

The normal pattern when we resume:

### **Family History Meeting Times**

The first Thursday and third Saturday of each month

2 – 5 pm at the Birchcliffe Centre

### **Archive Opening Times**

2 pm on the second Wednesday of the month; and

10 am on the fourth Saturday of the month.

Hebden Bridge Local History Society

The Birchcliffe Centre

Birchcliffe Road

Hebden Bridge

HX7 8DG