

NEWSLETTER

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The Appleby Beekeeper ...

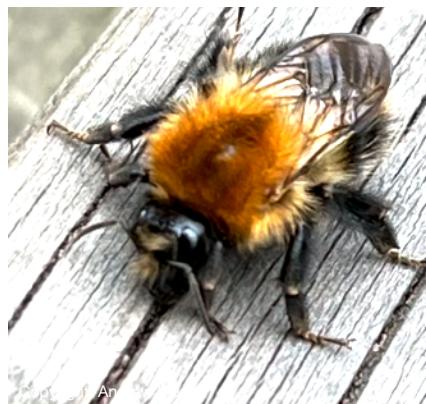
Anne Silins recalls her memories of the sweeter times in
Appleby Magna

Since ancient times honey has been celebrated for its medicinal qualities and the sweet taste of its golden liquid. Long ago during Roman times honey even had a 'honey tax' imposed on it. Not only was the honey important and treasured but the beeswax from the honey combs was put to use in many ways.

When wishing to buy a jar of honey in the village of Appleby Magna, in the 1940's and 1950's, people visited one of our village beekeepers. As a little girl one local beekeeper I remember with great affection lived in Rectory Lane. I no longer can remember his name, but I can remember how welcoming he was to any of the village children. With three other girls, Sally, Emily and Eunice, we walked along Rectory Lane to his workshop. This workshop was set back from the lane and stood beside his house. We, and any children, were always made welcome. We watched as he placed the honey combs into his centrifuge. If he wasn't too busy he would allow each of us to take a turn by turning the handle which in turn made the centrifuge spin. There were many gears, from the small handle at the front of the machine which started making the centrifuge spin at a very fast rate. As the centrifuge spun, the honey left the honey combs and hit the sides of the centrifuge. Then slowly the honey flowed down the metal sides and collected at the bottom of the metal drum. We all watched in awe and fascination.

Our village beekeeper had a few hives of his own in his back garden, but many people in the village allowed him to put his hives in their gardens and fields throughout the village. We had one at the shop in Church Street. Our hive sat at the end of the garden close to the Appleby brook. We didn't go there often because to disturb the bees I was told would not be a good idea. The only time, my Grandma, visited our hive was when a significant event took place in our village. At such an occasion she would slowly walk to the hives carrying a black piece of cloth. She would gently knock on the hive and tell the hive what had taken place, be it a death, birth or marriage. At this point she placed the black cloth very loosely over the

hive. The following day she would visit the bees again and take the cloth away. This practice had its root in Celtic mythology. Bees were thought to be integral members of the community. This was a quiet reverence of how our ancestors were close to their natural world. Some beekeepers went so far as to share a piece of wedding cake with their bees if the wedding was for a family member, thereby inviting the bees to celebrate too.



Our Appleby beekeeper would sell the jars of his golden honey either from his home, at the Bates Grocery Shop in Church Street or at the Appleby Post Office Shop at the top of Black Horse Hill. Many housewives, when out for a village walk found it easier and more

friendly to stop at his house and they would buy a jar of honey, enjoy a chat and hear village news. Sometimes we children would be asked to go to buy a jar and when we did our beekeeper would show with pride his garden and his hives.

Honey was not all our beekeeper received from his bees. There was also beeswax, honey combs are the storage 'bins' for the honey. Their six sided combs are strong and efficient, this hexagon shape minimises the amount of wax needed to hold the honey. They are a beautiful thing to behold. The bees secrete the beeswax from the underside of their abdomens, then use this wax to construct a honeycomb. This beeswax from the combs can be used for various things. The beekeeper would first wrap the combs in cheesecloth this will help filter out any solids. The beekeeper then melts the honeycomb by simmering them in a large pot of water. The melted beeswax is lighter than water, and so it floats to the surface. When it is cooled, he would take the wax and he may remelt and filter it once again and this would produce a cleaner wax.

Part two of this fascinating story will be in our February edition

Duncans' trips

Duncan Saunders, History Cafe member recalls a visit to Charlecote Park in Warwickshire he and his granddaughter enjoyed back during the summer

One of my grand-daughters, Emma, who is in her mid-20s is back at university and has time off in the summer. This is a good opportunity to take her to interesting places, with the added bonus that she will do the driving.

We have just been to Charlecote Park in Wellesbourne, Warwickshire; taking the more pleasant route we go down the Fosse Way and Charlecote is clearly signposted.

Having been a family home for 900 years it was transformed in the 19 century into one of the finest examples of the revival Elizabethan style. The aspects of the roof and chimney building reflect this. Although the walk from the car park to the house is quite long it is through extensive parkland where deer and Jacob sheep roam. The landscape is the work of Capability Brown.

Parts of the house are being renovated but the downstairs rooms were open and had a feeling of 'easy to live in', the kitchen being especially interesting.

Catering facilities are very good. Choose a fine day if you visit the Park and then you can also enjoy the extensive parkland.



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Urgent repairs required ...

Sally Lowe, Museum Manager, takes charge of rescue efforts

The Sir John Museum Foundation is grappling with a growing preservation crisis as water infiltration threatens its historic fabric and collections. Staff and volunteers report worsening leaks, with visible water lines now staining the dormitory, documents room, and exhibition hall. Most concerning is damp spreading near the iconic Latin Stairs, a cherished architectural feature, while a crack has emerged in the documents room ceiling—a sign of escalating structural stress.



Copyright. Sally Lowe

Despite recent inspections revealing no obvious damage to the lead roof and cleared gutters, the source of the water remains a mystery. "This is far worse than last week," said Sal Lowe, the Museum Manager is coordinating emergency efforts. "We're racing to relocate vulnerable archives and artifacts to the Writing Room, but it's a massive job."

The urgency has prompted collaboration with Historic England, which advised fast-tracking a grant application for a professional roof assessment. "We've shared extensive documentation, including photos of the damage," the museum's team noted. While awaiting support, staff emphasise the fragility of affected materials, from waterlogged documents to at-risk displays.

The situation underscores the vulnerabilities of aging heritage sites, where even minor environmental shifts can trigger irreversible harm.

Yet it also highlights the dedication of volunteers and experts working to safeguard history. As investigations continue, the museum's plight serves as a rallying cry for renewed investment in preservation—ensuring these spaces endure for future generations.

Radical Reforms

Richard Dunmore investigated big changes in “The New Scheme of 1861”

In 1861, Sir John Moore’s School underwent a transformative reform that reshaped its educational mission, bridging tradition and modernity amid shifting 19th-century ideals. Though long regarded as well-managed under its original statutes, the school’s classical curriculum—mandated by its founder—faced growing criticism for its rigidity. The Grammar Schools Act of 1840, which allowed endowed schools to revise their statutes, finally provided an avenue for change. By 1859, the governors, influenced by the struggles of institutions like Appleby School, resolved to petition the Charity Commissioners for a new governance scheme.

The resulting 1861 compromise, later scrutinised by the Taunton Commission (1868), revealed tensions between progressive governors and local elites. While some sought to convert the grammar school entirely into a village elementary institution, resistance from nearby professionals led to a dual-system solution.

The school split into two branches under one roof: the Latin (Upper) School and the English (Lower) School. The Latin School, fee-based and boarding-friendly, prepared affluent students for universities and professions, retaining its classical core but expanding into modern languages and sciences. Meanwhile, the English School adopted a National School model, offering elementary education to village boys. The Writing School, once a third branch, was abolished.

The reforms also reinforced the governors’ authority to dismiss masters “for reasonable cause,” aligning with original statutes. This structural shift mirrored broader Victorian debates about education’s role in social mobility and class divides. As the Taunton Commission noted, the compromise preserved elitist access to higher learning while grudgingly accommodating broader literacy needs.

Sir John Moore’s 1861 scheme stands as a landmark in educational history—a pragmatic yet imperfect balance between tradition and progress, reflecting the era’s competing visions for Britain’s scholastic future.



The Hasty Crown: King Harold’s Coronation in 1066

On January 5, 1066, King Edward the Confessor breathed his last in Westminster Palace, leaving England without a clear heir—and setting in motion one of the most fateful years in British history. Within 24 hours, his brother-in-law and most powerful noble, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, was crowned King of England in the newly completed Westminster Abbey.

The speed of Harold’s coronation was deliberate. With rival claimants circling, he needed to solidify his rule before challenges could take root. Edward, on his deathbed, had allegedly named Harold as his successor—a claim supported by the Witan, England’s royal council, which formally elected him king. The ceremony itself was led by Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury, a controversial figure who had been excommunicated by the Pope for holding office illegally—a detail that would later be used to undermine Harold’s legitimacy.

Yet Harold’s crown was far from secure. Across the Channel, William, Duke of Normandy, insisted Edward had promised him the throne years earlier. To the north, Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, laid claim through a hereditary agreement with a former English king. Both men began preparing for invasion, viewing Harold’s hasty coronation as a theft of their birthright.

Harold’s reign would last just nine months, ending with his death at the Battle of Hastings in October 1066. But his coronation—held in the same abbey where every English monarch has been crowned since—marked the last moment of Anglo-Saxon rule, and the spark that ignited the Norman Conquest that would reshape England forever.



The Kop: From Boer War Battlefield to Football Icon

In January 1900, during the Second Boer War, British forces suffered a devastating defeat at the **Battle of Spion Kop**—an imposing hill near Ladysmith, South Africa. The ill-planned assault cost over 300 British lives, a loss that reverberated across the nation and left a deep mark on public memory.

But how did this faraway conflict become tied to English football grounds? In the early 1900s, many clubs built large, steep terraces behind their goals to accommodate growing crowds. These sloping banks of standing spectators reminded people of Spion Kop's rugged slopes, and clubs began naming them "Spion Kop" (or simply "The Kop") as a tribute to the fallen troops.

From Liverpool's legendary Anfield Kop to smaller grounds across the country, the name evolved into a symbol of both remembrance and the passionate, tightly packed crowds that define British football culture. What began as a memorial to war has become an icon of the beautiful game.



First footing ...

A New Year tradition based in superstition ...



The custom of "first footing," a beloved New Year's tradition in the UK, traces its roots to ancient Norse and Celtic winter festivals. Most strongly associated with Scotland's Hogmanay celebrations, the practice centres on the belief that the first person to cross a home's threshold after midnight determines the household's luck for the coming year.

Historians link first footing to Viking invasions, when a tall, dark-haired stranger arriving with gifts (coal, bread, or whisky) symbolised prosperity—a contrast to fair-haired invaders, who were seen as harbingers of misfortune. By the 18th century, the ritual evolved into a communal gesture, with neighbours acting as "first footers," bearing symbolic offerings: coal for warmth, coins for wealth, and food for abundance.

The tradition spread across northern England and Northern Ireland through Scottish migration, adapting to regional quirks. In Yorkshire, for instance, the first footer must be male, while some areas still insist they enter empty-handed, then receive hospitality. Today, first footing endures as a blend of ancient superstition and festive camaraderie, reflecting the UK's enduring fascination with rituals that marry mystery to hope.